

Councillor's Companion

for Design in Planning



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Foreword

The Councillor's Companion will help elected members ensure that our neighbourhoods are well designed; providing much-needed homes with good access to local services and amenities - creating successful places where we all want to live and enjoy.

We explain how Councillors can make a positive difference through the planning process; ensuring well-designed places where walking, cycling and social exchange achieve a happier, healthier quality of life, with easily accessible economic and leisure activities.

Whether you are involved at cabinet level, on a planning committee, or have oversight of your ward and its development, you can make a difference. Getting involved in plan-making and reading your local design guidance is a vital element of your role in representing the needs and aspirations of your neighbourhood.

You can also ensure that your planning service is well resourced, that it has high-quality, trained planning and urban design professionals, and seek independent expert design advice from a design review panel when it is needed.

Left – Townhouses and practical, overlooked public space at Timekeepers Square, Salford

Below – Well-designed homes on this residential street incorporating front gardens, street trees and parking at Edgware Green, Harrow

Understanding the ingredients of successful places will help deliver popular and effective plans. The three most important characteristics of successful development are durability, fitness for purpose and beauty.

This Companion sets out the key characteristics of well-designed places and explains how to make informed decisions about the physical form of buildings and use of development, in the light of policy aimed at balancing public benefits.

By sharing experience in understanding what works well where, we can create lasting legacies in our neighbourhoods.





Part 1

Why do planning and design fit together?

In the context of planning, design is the process of working out the shape or form of a development. The planning system in the UK is concerned with:

- 📖 Land use: deciding which uses should go where, the relationships between these uses, and ensuring that they are fit for purpose.
- 📖 The physical form of development is defined by: its layout, height, massing and appearance. These play an important role in making a successful place that is easy to navigate, accessible and adaptable.

National planning policy is set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The NPPF is non-statutory guidance but is an important material consideration in local planning authorities' decision making. It is supported by online guidance from the National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG).

NPPF Paragraph 8 explains that the planning system has three overarching objectives:

- 1 Economic: to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy
- 2 Social: to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities
- 3 Environmental: to contribute to protecting and enhancing the natural, built and historic environment

Left – New public space encouraging wildlife, spaces for play and social exchange at St Mary's Churchyard Park at Elephant and Castle, London

From this framework of national policy, local planning authorities produce their own distinctive local and neighbourhood plans, which reflect the needs and priorities of their communities. Other statutory documents will be produced locally, such as Conservation Area Statements or Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) which contain greater detail on specific areas or design principles to guide change.

All these plans and documents must be in general conformity with the NPPF. The following paragraphs from the NPPF set out overarching planning policies.

NPPF Paragraph 7 states that:

'The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. At a very high level the objectives of sustainable development can be summarised as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.'

Paragraph 124 explains that:

'Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development'... and 'the creation of high quality buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve.'

Places have to work hard, accommodating different activities by different users at different times of the day. This can bring about conflict and planning seeks to

balance varying requirements.

The physical form of places, their layout and where different uses go, can help optimise the areas' usefulness for different people and minimise the potential problems each activity can cause for others. For example, careful design of restaurant extraction equipment beneath homes can avoid noise and odours, and raised crossing treatments on key pedestrian routes can help promote safety and accessibility.

Here are some ways you can help influence and manage the way places change so they improve and provide for the community:

- 📖 Get involved in plan-making
- 📖 Understand your design policies
- 📖 Ensure that your planning service is well-resourced; and that it has high-quality, trained urban design professionals
- 📖 Have access to independent expert design advice from a local design review panel when needed
- 📖 Get to know your area well and what is needed to improve it
- 📖 Understand what makes a successful place
- 📖 Attend as many training sessions as you can to learn about design and the built environment

Achieving policy objectives

Political objectives vary with changes in government, public opinion and circumstance. In the work of regional, city or local government administrations they can include the following priorities:

- 📖 Improving public health and wellbeing
- 📖 Stimulating and sustaining economic growth
- 📖 Promoting resource efficiency, including reducing carbon emissions
- 📖 Social inclusion and the creation of a fair society
- 📖 Building housing and increasing public appetite for development

Achieving these objectives requires many types of action and intervention. Planning can contribute to all of them, so it is appropriate that the planning system operates through the political system. Elected politicians from Secretaries of State to Parish Councillors are directly involved in making local and neighbourhood plans, taking planning decisions and representing their communities.

Right – An accessible park and outdoor gym enjoyed by all ages

These political objectives can be met at a variety of scales. Whether they are being applied to the design of a house extension, a neighbourhood, village, town or city, the focus must be on creating development that will work well for its purpose and mature successfully.

NPPF Paragraph 91 states that: *‘Planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places which: Promote social interaction... Are safe and accessible... Enable and support healthy lifestyles...’*

It goes on to say that wellbeing needs to include: *‘The provision of safe and accessible green infrastructure, sports facilities, local shops, access to healthier food, allotments and layouts that encourage walking and cycling.’*



Chapter 5 of the NPPF refers to the need to deliver a sufficient supply of homes.

NPPF Paragraph 59 states that:

‘To support the Government’s objective of significantly boosting the supply of homes, it is important that a sufficient amount of variety of land can come forward where it is needed, that the needs of groups with specific housing requirements are addressed and that land with permission is developed without unnecessary delay.’

The NPPF sets out in Chapter 6 its objective to build a strong, competitive economy.

NPPF Paragraph 80 states that:

‘Planning policies and decisions should help create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt.’

Planning for good design can help achieve these objectives by:

- 📖 Setting out clearly in local plans the aims and ambitions of local people and their needs
- 📖 Involving local people to engage with the plan-making process
- 📖 Ensuring that what is built is of high quality

The plan-making process should help identify a sufficient amount and variety of land, appropriately located to provide homes for specific needs.

Evidence-based local plans will set out the detail, identifying the size, type and tenure of homes.

The aim is to create mixed and balanced communities supporting social inclusion.

Other policy objectives will relate to the planning and design of accessible neighbourhood amenities such as public open space, walking and cycling routes, schools, medical and community facilities and leisure activities.

NPPF Paragraph 11 explains that:

‘Plans and decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development.’ This means that planning authorities ‘should positively seek opportunities to meet the development needs of their area and be sufficiently flexible to adapt to rapid change.’

As Local Councillors we are well placed to see and drive these changes.

Making good decisions

With a presumption in favour of development, it is important to understand what are legitimate planning concerns, and what are not; this will aid discussions with your constituents and decision making at planning committees.

Although residents may have concerns regarding many aspects of change in their area, some of these might not be relevant when negotiating or deciding on a planning application. For example, people might be worried about construction traffic and noise. But this is not a valid reason to amend or refuse a planning application (although you, and they, might like to scrutinise and request changes to any construction noise and vibration management plan that is required).

Similarly, it will be helpful to explain to residents that national planning policies set a presumption in favour of development: a positive approach to change. Change may be inevitable, so you may like to steer residents to legitimate planning issues, as expressed in planning policies, and help them think through how they feel proposals relate to these. The design issues covered in this Companion are all legitimate planning issues, so people who focus on these will have more opportunity to influence how their area changes.

A planning application should be decided in line with policies in the local development plans, unless the council decides that some other material planning consideration justifies making a decision contrary to those policies. Local development plans include the council's own local plan as well as neighbourhood plans and those made on a wider basis such as plans made by National Park authorities, the London Plan and city-region plans produced by combined authorities. For this document, we will just refer to 'local plans'.

NPPF Paragraph 38 states that:

Local planning authorities should approach decisions on proposed developments in a positive and creative way. They should use the full range of planning tools available... and work proactively with applicants to secure developments that will improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area. Decision-makers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible.'

Right – Site visits: watch how people use and move around an area

Each local authority has an adopted code of conduct that sets out rules governing the decision-making role of Councillors. This local code recognises your role as someone who has a significant influence in built-environment decision making, a ‘Place-Shaper’. It will guide you in taking part in pre-application discussions on behalf of your community, and engaging in spatial planning for the whole authority.

In your decision-making role on a planning committee you judge the needs of the present generation and ensure the requirements of future generations are taken into account by determining if the application before you meets, on balance, policy requirements.



To help you do this:

- 📖 **Meet and listen** to the views of interested parties. Keep an open mind until all views, including those put forward at a planning meeting, have been aired
- 📖 **Learn how to speed-read** so that you can read every planning report, including the legal documentation
- 📖 **Make clear your concerns**, and those of your community, being mindful not to predetermine an application
- 📖 **Do not say, write or do anything** that would make it appear that you have already decided how you are going to vote prior to hearing the case at planning committee
- 📖 **If you object to a proposal, represent your community** by speaking at the planning committee meeting, setting out clearly where, and why, you consider the application departs from policy
- 📖 **Be prepared to attend an appeal hearing** if the application is refused to submit your planning arguments and evidence to the Planning Inspectorate

Design quality and viability

National policy says that a development's viability is a legitimate planning concern, and planning must take into account what is economic to build. Some people argue that good design costs more and can reduce a scheme's viability. This may occasionally be the case if matters of design are being used to argue for a smaller amount of development, or more expensive materials or detailing, for example. However, in most cases good design does not cost more. Good designers will be open to the challenge of working within a budget and viability should never be an excuse for poor design.

Bear in mind that a well-designed building or place maintains long-term value, contributes to the health and well-being of society and can be a welcomed neighbour to an existing community. Consider the following:


- Materials, landscaping and details will have some effect on building costs and viability. Such costs are likely to be small compared to the costs of land acquisition and general construction. A scheme that relies on low-quality materials and skimp on landscaping to be viable, is unlikely to age well, be easy to manage and maintain, or contribute positively to the neighbourhood



- Careful planning and design could lead to a greater amount of development or higher density, to make best use of the site without detracting from the area's attractive character
- Planning and designing in response to the character of a place may involve optimising height, bulk and plot coverage to ensure that new development is in keeping with its context, and makes a positive contribution to that character
- Exploring alternative building layouts, orientation, shapes and uses for the site, perhaps using design review, may create a scheme that not only fits in better, but allows more development than one that uses standard building types or layouts

Left – Workshops are a useful way of engaging communities and stakeholders

Below – Planning is creative; explore alternative building layouts, orientation, shapes and uses



Making a significant improvement to a place can be hard to achieve within a narrowly drawn site boundary. The answer may be to consider how best to negotiate, approve and deliver benefits from the development beyond the site. This could be in terms of public space, local amenities, and better walking and cycling opportunities. These will all contribute to long-term improvements in health as well as well-being.

However, such wider benefits must not be viewed as ‘compensation’ for a poorly designed development but as a necessary contribution to delivering a connected and easily accessible place.

Legal agreements and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) payments can help to fund such changes; but their design and location matter, so negotiating this through the planning application process can be useful. Masterplans, area strategies and proposals for wider public realm improvements will all help to deliver better outcomes.

How can we achieve well-designed places?

Involve people

NPPF Paragraph 16 says plans should:

'Be prepared positively, in a way that is aspirational but deliverable; be shaped by early, proportionate and effective engagement between plan-makers and communities, local organisations, businesses, infrastructure providers and operators and statutory consultees.'

Making planning and design processes work well depends on getting the most from all these people. The knowledge that local people have of what works well, and what doesn't, is important. Bringing people together early in the process contributes to good planning by ensuring that local knowledge, ambitions and needs are considered throughout the process of policy and plan making and create a sense of belonging.



Politicians represent both the interest of existing and future communities. It is an important and sometimes challenging role to play. You will need to balance the interests of individual constituents, the wider social needs of the local community, and the broader requirements of business, the local economy and the environment.

It is important for communities (not just community leaders) to become involved in making plans and responding to planning proposals. There are always a variety of interest groups, many of them overlapping. Some interests will be held in common, while others will conflict, and there will be conflicts in short-, medium- and long-term interests. Bringing people together at an early and meaningful stage in plan-making, Councillors can play an important role in working out how development can contribute to the greater good by promoting common interests.



Left – Physical models of schemes help people understand. Different models can be used through all stages of the design process; concept, planning, detailed design and marketing. Bringing people together early in the process contributes to good planning

Although there is no statutory requirement for applicants to undertake pre-application consultation, Councillors should encourage developers to engage with local communities at the pre-application stage. The NPPF encourages (where appropriate) the preparation of design codes and independent advice through design review panels, both of which support pre-application scheme design evolution.

NPPF Paragraph 39 says that:

‘Early engagement has significant potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning application system for all parties.’

Workshops, sometimes called charrettes, can be a useful way of engaging communities and other significant stakeholders in developing policies, masterplans or design briefs for specific sites, or in the early design of schemes. Digital technologies can help people understand places including

applications such as Commonplace and Placecheck. In the case of important or strategic development proposals you should request a physical model so that locals can get to grips with its likely impact and potential benefits.

Increasingly, planning authorities are signing up to 3D computer modelling applications such as Vu.City that show the visual context of development accurately. Consider asking developers in your area to contribute financially to these tools to help communities understand development proposals. Neighbourhood planning is increasingly being used to enable local communities to pro-actively influence planning and development. Councillors can help create a neighbourhood plan by setting up a neighbourhood forum if you do not have a parish or town council. Local authorities should actively support neighbourhood planning and there are some resources available from Locality to help them do it.



Involve professionals

There are a multitude of specialisms within the built environment profession and they can provide specific advice and input to the council. This expertise can be secured through a design review panel, most beneficial at the early stage of projects' development and/or through a Section 106 legal agreement. This binding contract between the applicant and the planning authority sets out the framework for delivery. This may cover for example; resources to monitor and act on behalf of the council during the reserved matters phase of a project, the number of homes and amenities to be provided within the development, and requirements of a construction management plan.

Planning Performance Agreements can be useful on a larger schemes as a voluntary agreement between your planning authority, a developer and other parties to ensure expectations are met through the determination process, including the evolution of the design.



Above – Site visits with stakeholders are an invaluable way of experiencing and better understanding the character and potential opportunities of a place

Left – Setting out objectives and local need in plan making and through collaborative working will help deliver what is needed in your area

Involve other authorities

Beyond your local area, the government expects effective cooperation across administrative boundaries. NPPF Paragraphs 24-27 set out how neighbouring local planning authorities have a duty to cooperate with each other and with other prescribed bodies, such as county councils, national parks and combined authorities, on strategic matters that cross administrative boundaries.

NPPF Paragraph 20 states that: *‘Strategic policies should set out an overall strategy for the pattern, scale and quality of development...’*

This may be achieved through formal joint working, combined authorities, joint spatial plans, and strategic policies on quality in combined plans.

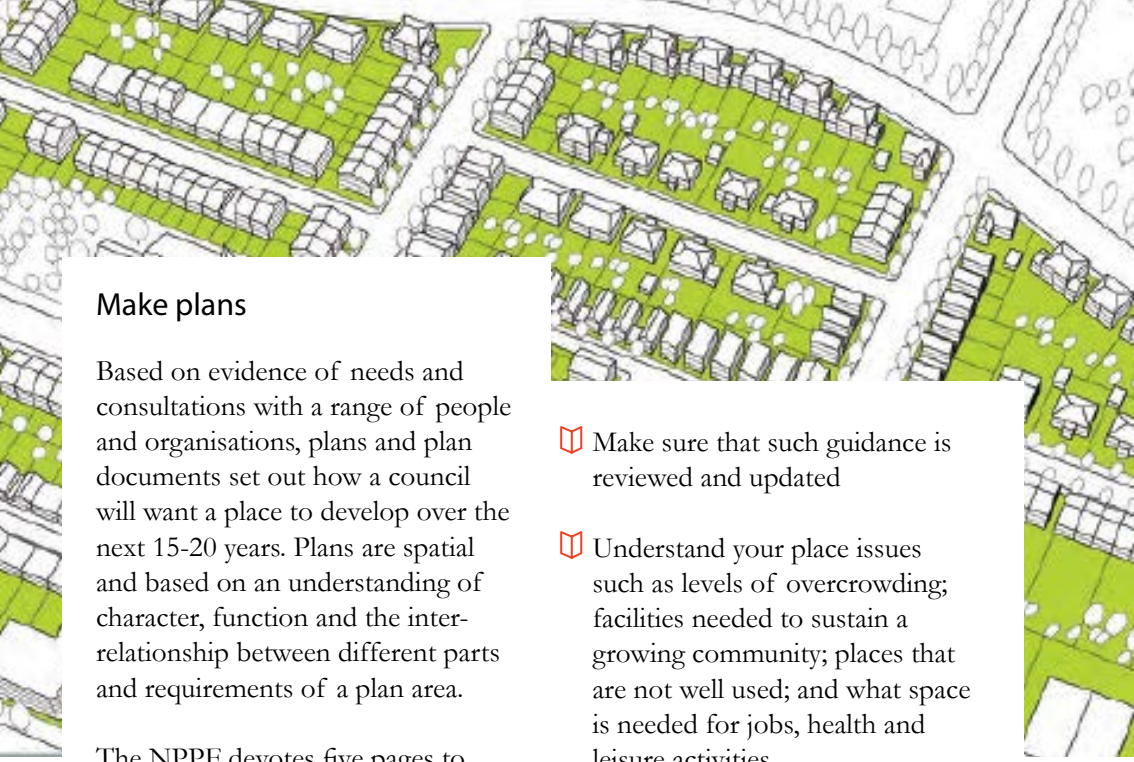
NPPF Paragraph 40 acknowledges: the key role local planning authorities have *‘In encouraging other parties to take maximum advantage of the pre-application stage,’* although it does not require developers to do this.

Building relationships locally and making plans together, and across administrative and political boundaries, will take time and need resourcing.

Meeting with neighbouring authority Councillors, encouraging good design and working together to get homes and local amenities delivered can benefit communities. Often our municipal boundaries do not align with communities of interest or local need.



Above – Establish good relationships with neighbouring authorities, neighbouring Councillors and work together for the benefit of all



Make plans

Based on evidence of needs and consultations with a range of people and organisations, plans and plan documents set out how a council will want a place to develop over the next 15-20 years. Plans are spatial and based on an understanding of character, function and the inter-relationship between different parts and requirements of a plan area.

The NPPF devotes five pages to plan-making (Paragraphs 15-37). It strongly encourages local planning authorities to have a plan that addresses the strategic priorities and sets out housing targets for the area. If there is not an adapted local plan, refusals of planning permission are unlikely to be upheld at appeal. This may result in speculative development and places that are poorly designed, and fail to respond to local needs or offer public benefits.

It is important that Councillors get involved as early as possible with plan-making: with your local plan, supplementary planning documents, masterplans and neighbourhood plans. Find out where these are in the process, work with officers, and involve as many other people, community leaders and groups as you can. You should:

📖 Find out what design policies are in the plan and if you have Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs), which add further detail to the policies.

📖 Make sure that such guidance is reviewed and updated

📖 Understand your place issues such as levels of overcrowding; facilities needed to sustain a growing community; places that are not well used; and what space is needed for jobs, health and leisure activities

📖 Tell planning officers what is needed in your area and where you see the opportunities to provide this. The sooner these needs are part of the area plan, the greater the likelihood they will be delivered

📖 Work with the wider community to plan for future generations by understanding population trends and local need. Consider and plan for what movement networks will be required to access homes, community amenities, jobs, health facilities, leisure and shopping areas

NPPF Paragraph 15 states that:

‘The planning system should be genuinely plan-led: succinct and up-to-date plans should provide a positive vision for the future of each area; a framework for addressing housing needs and other economic, social and environmental priorities; and a platform for local people to shape their surroundings’

Influence design quality

There are different ways and tools to positively influence design quality and the NPPF encourages the use of these.

NPPF Paragraph 126 says that:

‘To provide maximum clarity about design expectations at an early stage, plans or supplementary planning documents should use visual tools such as design guides and codes’ It explains that ‘local planning authorities should ensure that they have access to, and make appropriate use of, tools and processes for assessing and improving the design of development.’

Design review, design codes and assessment frameworks such as Building for Life 12 can help to raise standards of development.

Design & Access Statement

(DAS) preparation is a requirement for many planning applications. The statement must set out how a proposed development is a suitable response to the site and its setting, demonstrating it can be appropriately accessed by users; it also sets out the consultation steps taken by the applicant, allowing Councillors to understand whether local engagement and early design evolution have taken local considerations into account

A Statement of Community

Involvement may be required, to demonstrate that participation and consultation have been taken into account in the design evolution.

Design review is best undertaken early in a project’s life as it is an opportunity for the design approach to be constructively evaluated and critiqued by experts.

Having a further design review at a later stage can help to ensure that detailed design stages create development that will meet the needs of all the people who will use it and be affected by it.

A design code is a document that sets rules for the design of new development within a development or area, particularly where it may be built out in more than one phase and by more than one developer. It is a mechanism that enables design guidelines or standards to be established and gives instructions to the degree or precision of more detailed design work that the development is expected to meet.

Assessment frameworks, such as ‘Building for Life 12: the sign of a good place to live’, are also encouraged in the NPPF. They are useful ways to both structure a discussion about a housing scheme, ensuring that all important practical issues are covered, and to assess the scheme when it has been built.



NPPF Paragraph 129 notes that: planning authorities ‘should have regard to the outcome of these processes, including any recommendations made by design review panels.’

The key to influencing good design in your area is to understand how places work, or could work better; and how a place is used and if it is fit for purpose. You can then discuss how change can make places work better for people.

The following points help you to influence and maintain design quality in relation to individual planning applications and proposals:

- 📖 **Encourage the use of design review**, tools and frameworks, as set out above
- 📖 **Ask to see pre-application drawings** and, with officers (on site if practical), discuss the good and the bad aspects of any development, how it might work for the neighbourhood, and what your community will or will not want to see
- 📖 **Enquire** if applicants have undertaken a context appraisal on their proposals to show how the scheme relates to its neighbours and makes the most of its setting
- 📖 **Engage with developers**, letting them know what you need in your area and responding to their consultations
- 📖 **Encourage people** to get involved early in the process, through consultations and public engagement
- 📖 **Promote the benefits** of good design; ensure that every new development or space is fit for purpose and well built
- 📖 **Ask to see details** and samples of building materials, and make sure that they are specified in planning conditions, where necessary, so that the quality cannot later be reduced
- 📖 **Visit built schemes** that you have been involved with and learn what could be improved in future
- 📖 **Encourage post-occupancy surveys** so residents can comment on the success of a development once built, to help improve future developments

Left – Get people involved early on in the process

NPPF Paragraph 124 states that:

Planning policies and decisions ‘should support the creation of high quality buildings and places,’

It expects that local design policies should be developed with local communities to reflect local aspirations, and that plans should set out a clear design vision and expectations, so that applicants have as much certainty as possible about what sort of development is likely to be acceptable.

Retaining quality

After approval, design codes, materials and other planning conditions, including retaining architects to guard against the dilution of architectural quality post-permission, can be insisted on. These conditions can be written into a Section 106 legal agreement between the applicant and the planning authority.

The government commissioned independent review by Dame Judith Hackitt revealed the importance of design quality surviving from permission to build out. Hackitt said that, *‘value engineering is anything but value, it is cutting costs and quality. The structure of industry has to change to make it more effective.’*

We need to put a focus on the way in which buildings are procured. If we have a process that makes people bid at a cost they can’t afford to deliver at, we set ourselves up to fail.’

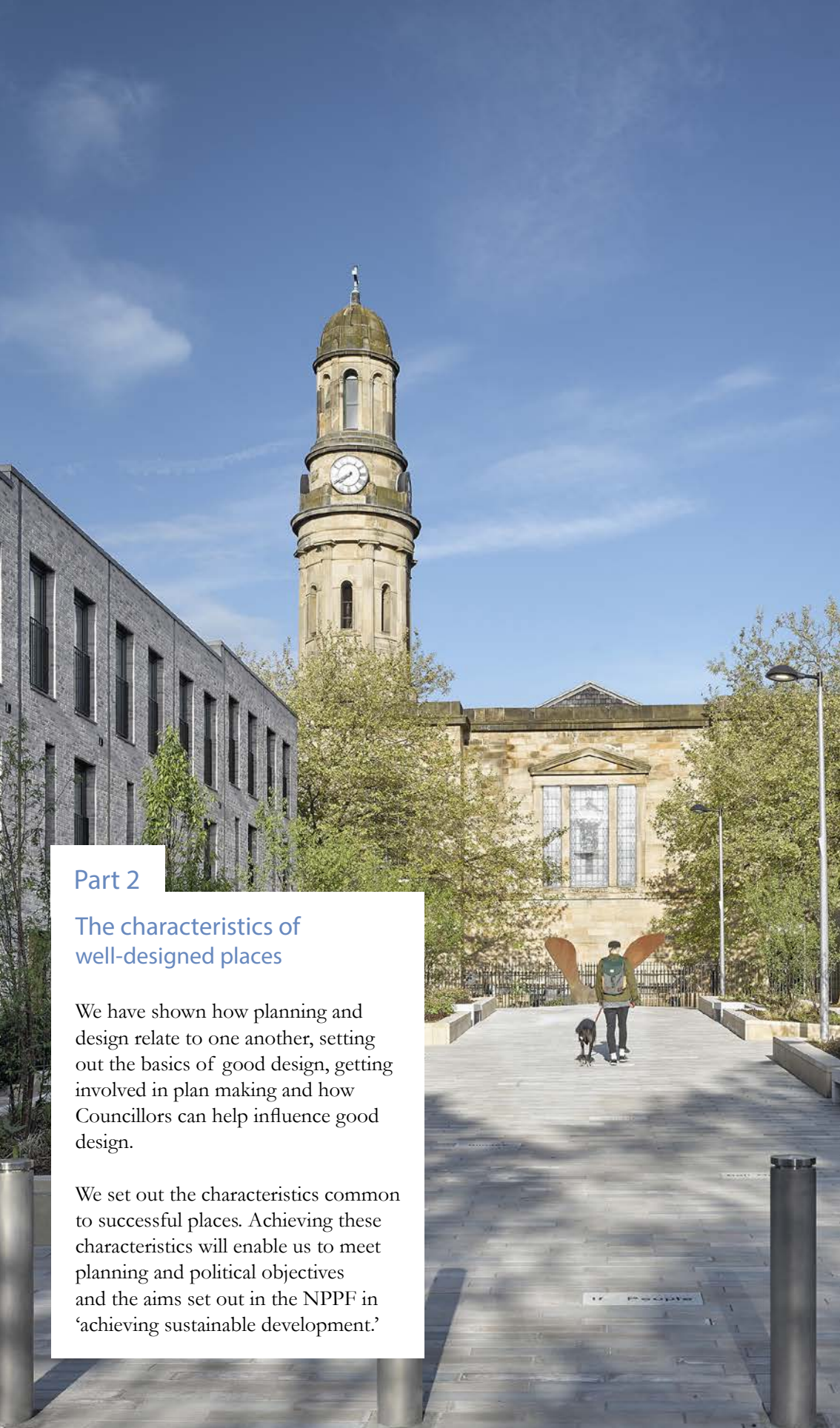
Hackitt said the industry needed to focus on the health and wellbeing of the general public rather than focusing just on its workforce. *‘People are looking for quick fixes but they need to understand that root-and-branch reform is required. [Grenfell] has to be a turning point to bring about the culture change we need.’*

To achieve well-designed places community leaders must secure the integrity of the design and detailing from permission to completion.

Insist that quality is retained throughout the process to avoid your consented development turning into the constructed project, instead of deteriorating like neglected jelly.

The Design Network and other bodies can help you in your role as an elected leader of your community and to avoid common pitfalls. As well as design review, they offer a range of learning, briefing and networking events tailored to suit your local requirements.





Part 2

The characteristics of well-designed places

We have shown how planning and design relate to one another, setting out the basics of good design, getting involved in plan making and how Councillors can help influence good design.

We set out the characteristics common to successful places. Achieving these characteristics will enable us to meet planning and political objectives and the aims set out in the NPPF in 'achieving sustainable development.'

Left – The use of sympathetic materials in the public realm has created a distinctive, quality space

These characteristics relate to how we use and experience places.

They are:

- 🏠 Having a complementary mix of uses and activities
- 🏠 Being fit for purpose, accommodating uses well
- 🏠 Encouraging easy movement
- 🏠 Creating high-quality public space
- 🏠 Being adaptable to changing needs and circumstances
- 🏠 Being efficient in how land and other resources are used
- 🏠 Having an appearance that is appealing and appreciated
- 🏠 Having a distinctive, positive identity and sense of place

A mix of uses and activities

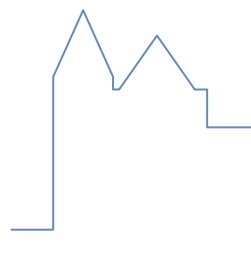
Uses are the activities, occupations, businesses or operations carried out in a building or on land. They help to determine the life and vitality of a place. Different uses need to work together, be in the right place and have users to support them.

Some uses rely on other uses to work properly. For example, chemists are well located near doctors' surgeries, and nursery schools near homes. Sometimes uses can work well together: sharing a

building, split across floors, or facing each other across a street, where people and servicing can come and go with minimal disturbance. As a local Councillor you will know about local demand for particular uses and whether they may be viable in the longer-term.

Think about:

- 🏠 How different uses relate to transport infrastructure and patterns of movement
- 🏠 How the different uses and activities will be serviced and supported
- 🏠 How the different uses will complement one another
- 🏠 How any potential conflicts between different uses can be managed or designed out
- 🏠 How the place can allow for changing uses and activities over a day, a week or a season



Being fit for purpose

A development or place that is fit for purpose will work for the people who live or work there, and those who pass it. Homes will be pleasant and convenient to live in. For example, they will be easily accessible from the street and surrounding area. There may be generic requirements in planning guidance or building regulations. Matters such as floor-to-ceiling heights and delivery areas for shops, and noise, privacy and internal storage space for homes. These standards can help in understanding how a place can be fit for purpose.

Think about:

- 🏠 How a development will meet the specific needs of its users
- 🏠 How easy it will be to maintain and manage
- 🏠 How convenient it will be to access deliveries and servicing, such as waste removal
- 🏠 How easy play and social spaces will be to get to and supervise
- 🏠 How adequate levels of sunlight and daylight are assessed, and if they make sense
- 🏠 How the microclimate may impact on a place and affect comfort levels



Above – Uncluttered public realm detailing in Sheffield has incorporated lighting adjacent to tree pits and clear pedestrian routes into town

Top – A well landscaped, convenient and pleasant space for meeting neighbours at Windmill Place, Thame.

Easy to get around

To create a successful place it is important to consider how easy it is for people to get around and how well a development is connected to the surrounding area. Routes and movements between places and spaces need to feel safe, comfortable and convenient for everyone, ensuring that there is sufficient capacity for the pedestrians and vehicles that use them.

Streets, roads, footpaths and cycleways can encourage easy movement by giving people a choice of routes to the places they want to get to. Streets are more than just traffic channels for vehicles: they are places for people. Well-designed streets encourage people to use them and make being outside a safer and more pleasant experience.

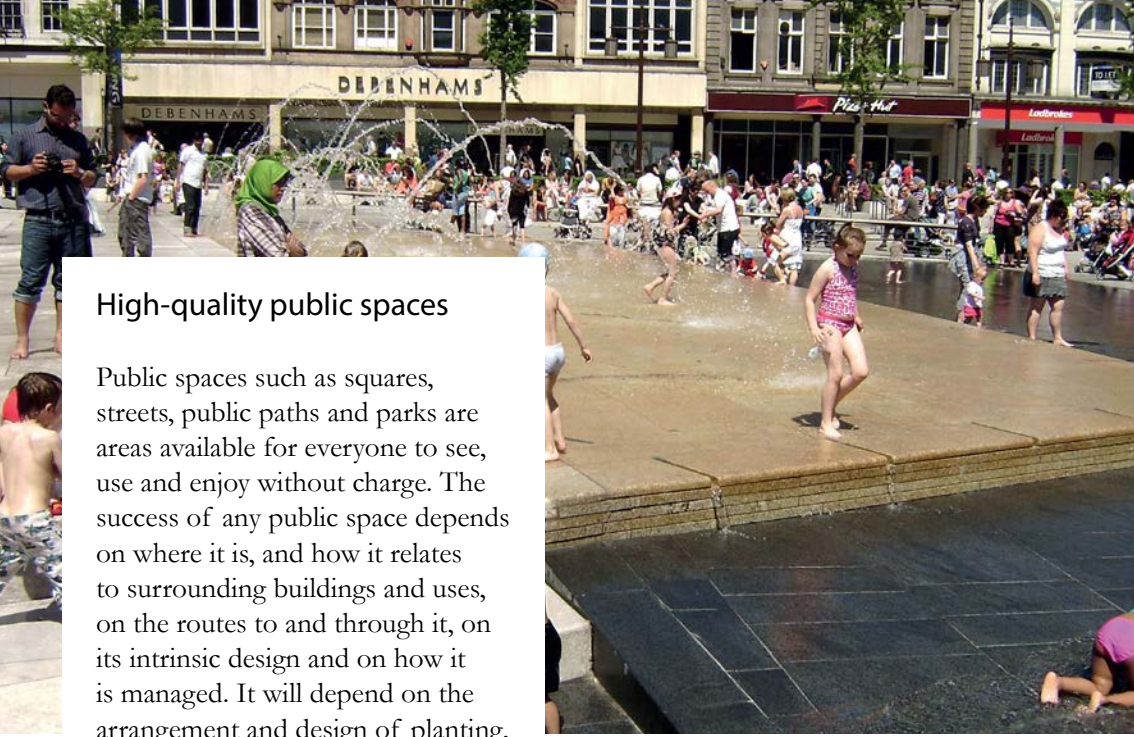


Above – This elderly cyclist decided to ride on the wrong side of the road; however as the street is designed for slower vehicle movement, drivers were able to carefully, and safely, pass him.

Think about:

- 🏠 **The movement network** – is it efficient, useful and easy to understand?
- 🏠 **Desire lines** – can you get to places quickly and directly?
- 🏠 **Inclusive environments** – can everyone move around easily irrespective of age or ability?
- 🏠 **People first** – support designs which consider the most vulnerable users first. The hierarchy is pedestrians first, followed by cyclists and public transport users, with motor vehicle users last
- 🏠 **Discourage places** that allow cars to dominate physically and visually
- 🏠 **What opportunities** there are for development to improve connections in the area?





High-quality public spaces

Public spaces such as squares, streets, public paths and parks are areas available for everyone to see, use and enjoy without charge. The success of any public space depends on where it is, and how it relates to surrounding buildings and uses, on the routes to and through it, on its intrinsic design and on how it is managed. It will depend on the arrangement and design of planting, paving, lighting, orientation, shelter, signage, street furniture and how well these are maintained.

Public spaces can be full at lunch time or after school, and have quieter periods during the day or late evening. Make sure that the space caters for a wide range of users, no matter the time of day.

Think about:

- ⬆ The types of spaces, and how buildings help to frame, enclose, oversee and activate streets and public spaces
- ⬆ Whether the proportions of spaces and buildings help to create a pleasing and comfortable place
- ⬆ How an area's spaces contribute to its identity
- ⬆ The effect of buildings on the public realm microclimate
- ⬆ Whether public spaces are located at centres of activity and through routes
- ⬆ How well a space will be landscaped through planting, surfacing and furnishing, and how well it will be maintained
- ⬆ What is unique to the place and how local distinctiveness can be retained where historic boundaries, building lines and plot sizes are significant

Left – The dramatic re-design of Nottingham city's historic central Market Square has transformed the area into a lively centre of community activity and higher retail footfall

Being adaptable

Successful places flourish under changing conditions by being adaptable. Adaptable buildings and places are able to accommodate new or shared uses and changing demands and circumstances. They are capable of having a long life without inconvenient or expensive renovations and by avoiding unnecessary demolition.

Think about:

- 🏠 How a development may help prevent climate change
- 🏠 How a place can be made adaptable by planning a network of streets and paths, with street width and block sizes that can accommodate very different forms of development in future

- 🏠 How the place will be able to adapt to changing working practices and demands in office and industrial buildings, and changing living and home working circumstances
- 🏠 Whether there is potential to adapt over time; making changes such as subdividing space, dividing and adding entrances and servicing, putting in or taking out stairs and lifts, and changing servicing requirements
- 🏠 How the place's identity has been shaped by its ability to adapt in the past

Being efficient

At a time when climate change is a priority, the efficient use of resources is an essential element of design quality. Well-designed places are efficient; they do not waste land, water or energy or create unnecessary requirements for people to travel.

Think about:

- ⏏ How the structure and form of a place make it efficient to use and maintain, for example, by making it easy to walk to school.
- ⏏ How well existing buildings or other elements are used, even if for only a short time.
- ⏏ How the design of a place affects its need for energy through the creation of solar gain, overshadowing or cross-ventilation.
- ⏏ How well waste is dealt with and whether there is scope for community based recycling or composting.
- ⏏ How well rain water is dealt with, for example whether it is stored and used, and if the run-off will be slowed down through sustainable urban drainage systems.



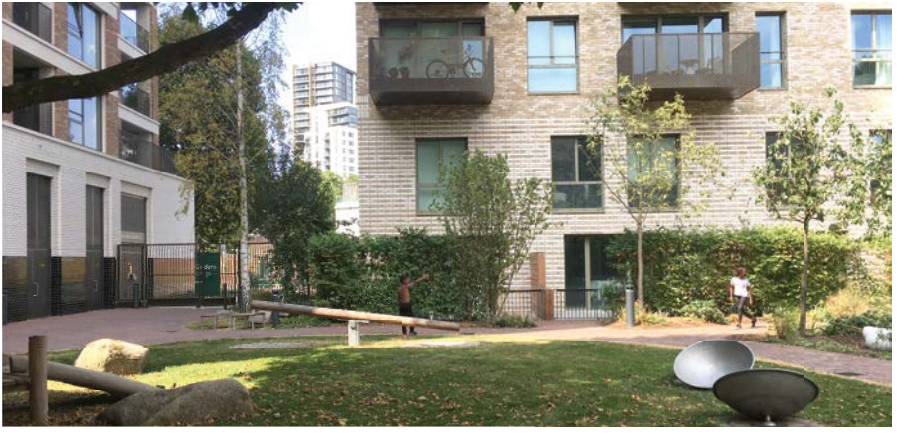
- ⏏ How demand for energy can be minimised and how the energy needed can be created locally or with the fewest negative impacts on the environment.

An appealing appearance

The visual appearance of a development is often created through architectural treatments. Understanding why a particular approach to a development's appearance has been taken, and how this fits with local policies and priorities, will help identify its suitability for an area.

Think about:

- ⏏ How buildings and streets integrate with the area's natural setting, and how they relate to views, the skyline and landmarks in the area.



⏏ The proportions of buildings and their elements, and how well these relate to the whole.

⏏ How much thought has been given to the relationship between one part of the development and another, between each part and the whole, between solid and void elements of the facade (walls and windows), and between the proposed development and its surroundings.

⏏ The order expressed in designs, including the extent to which balance, repetition and symmetry contribute to a pleasing sense of order, where this is appropriate.

⏏ The style or styles used, and whether this emulates a local vernacular, incorporating or interpreting the form and details of local traditional buildings. Whether the style used is done well, or if a few details are being mindlessly copied without capturing any of the essential identity of the original.



Above – The consideration of plot dimensions help to create buildings with distinctive character along the River Sheaf in Sheffield

Top right– Landscaping, along with simple play equipment has made an attractive communal garden in Elephant Park, Southwark

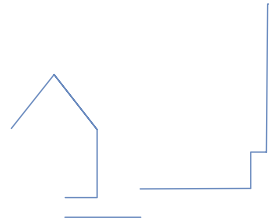
Top left – Passivhaus town houses and flats responding to a traditional terraced street within a conservation area in Wansley Street, Southwark



Above – Different responses to context resulting in positive identities, Derwenthorpe, York



Left – Grey to Green rain gardens, Sheffield





A positive identity

A place's identity is influenced by how people feel about an environment and the importance of belonging. It relates to current uses, how the place works, the patterns of movement, what the spaces are like and how they are enclosed, how adaptable and resilient the place is, how efficient it is in its use of resources and what it looks like.

Think about:

- 🏠 The things that constitute the special identity and distinctive nature of any place being not the same for everyone
- 🏠 What evidence can be gathered to evaluate all the elements that contribute to identity before making planning decisions

- 🏠 How communities identify with with an area, and what important elements they contribute to its unique identity
- 🏠 How discussions around identity or threats to what people hold dear can be highly emotive and raise fears about change
- 🏠 In some situations, discussions about identity. are seen as a way to oppose development, hoping to make the scheme unviable or undeliverable

Aspects of development form

Layout, scale, density, materials and details are the physical elements that together create and shape a building or a place.

Planning applications set out the form of a proposed development, local planning policies seek to influence it, and the viability, deliverability and acceptability of schemes depend on it.

Aspects of development form are:

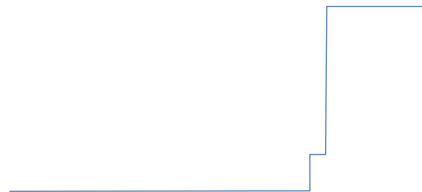
- 1 Layout
- 2 Scale
- 3 Density
- 4 Materials
- 5 Detail

Clear planning policies and design guidance can inform developers and development on what will be acceptable, or not, while conditions accompanying any permission can seek to ensure that details drawn up will be appropriate.



Layout

Layout is the way in which buildings, routes and open spaces are placed in relation to each other. It provides the two-dimensional structure on which all other aspects of the form and uses of a development depend.



Left – Plan of St Chad's Tilbury, Thurrock

Top – Creating links and connections to the wider area contributes to the vibrancy of streets: St Chad's Tilbury, Thurrock

Paragraph 127 of the NPPF says:

Planning policies and decisions should aim to ensure that developments...optimise the potential of the site to accommodate development... and support local facilities and transport networks.'

Think about:

- 🏠 Whether a new development will fit in well with the surrounding layout, link up with its routes, and feel like a homogenous part of the neighbourhood
- 🏠 Whether the layout represents an efficient use of space and allows for a positive relationship between buildings and spaces

Below - Through careful consideration of the layout this development links well with surrounding routes: St Chad's, Tilbury, Essex

- 🏠 Whether it will be clear what is private or public space, and whether front doors and windows to more public building uses will face public space
- 🏠 How people will move around, and whether opportunities to provide the most direct and shortest routes for those walking and cycling have been taken, even if these routes are not open to motor vehicles
- 🏠 Whether the layout respects the topography of the area, the character of the neighbourhood and the orientation of the site to ensure that it does not feel separate
- 🏠 Whether the scale of development, streets and spaces feel appropriate to their surroundings, and for the uses to be accommodated. Remember, excessively large scale housing developments with single use can add to a sense of placelessness



Scale

Scale is the size of a building or other development in relation to its surroundings, or the size of parts of a building or its details, particularly in relation to the size of a person. The scale of a development is often expressed in terms of height and massing.

A tall building is often defined as a one that is significantly higher than most of its surrounding buildings or that significantly changes the skyline. The visual impact is not the only thing to consider. A tall building may introduce intensive land uses with different servicing and management requirements to those of surrounding buildings. It may have an impact on the microclimate and privacy of surrounding areas due to overlooking, shadowing and wind creation.



The design of buildings can be assessed, among other ways, by performance standards, such as assessing liveability and matters of home comforts such as noise, temperature and natural lighting. It is a basic right of residents and building users to be able to control their living and working conditions, regulating minimum and maximum temperatures, enjoying natural light and visual privacy, and minimising noise, without undue cost or difficulty.

Think about:

🏠 The different dimensions that make up scale: not only height, but also depth and width. For schemes such as individual houses, remember that the depth will have an effect on the roof shape, potentially leading to excessively steep pitches.

🏠 How the scale of the proposal fits with the surrounding area; whether the gradient or other topographic features will help to mask or accentuate it; and whether it will, in time, become integrated into the neighbourhood.

Left – We can question whether scale has been considered in this development, adjacent to and over-powering a listed public house

Right – Using distinctive materials, these houses are sensitive to the height and width of existing, adjacent homes

- 🏠 What the development will feel and look like from the street.
- 🏠 What the development will be like to live or work in, considering privacy and overlooking, natural light and ventilation.
- 🏠 The impact of features described as landmarks, gateways and icons. Are they really needed? Will they deliver other benefits beyond just a dominant structure in the townscape?
- 🏠 The scale of parts of the building as well as its whole, and how these will work on the ground and first floors, as experienced close up.
- 🏠 The scale of spaces as well as buildings and the relationship between the two.



Density

Density is the amount of development on a given piece of land. The concept is important to planning and design as a means of managing growth targets, the amount of activity and the corresponding demand for services, influencing the scale and massing and making the best use of available land.

Higher densities generally mean more people in an area. This can be beneficial, leading to more customers for shops and restaurants, more justification for improvements to public transport and social facilities and more life in the streets and spaces. But it can also lead to increased pressure and demand on both space and services, and it can introduce conflict and a real or perceived reduction in peace, privacy and serenity. These are issues that will affect new residents and existing communities alike.

To deal with such issues it can be useful to ask about the carrying capacity of new and changing areas. Consider setting performance standards or spatial thresholds for matters such as the size of pavements, public spaces and amenity spaces. These can relate to the number of people who will need to use them, and how comfortable, clean and peaceful such places will be, for example.

Think about:

- 🏠 Why you are interested in the density figure. It may be a useful indicator of whether housing targets are being met, but it will not be a good indicator of the likely form, quality or appropriateness of any scheme
- 🏠 How you want the building amount to be measured (homes, habitable rooms, bed spaces, floor space), and what the chosen measure will tell you?
- 🏠 Whether you are looking at net or gross densities, and whether these relate to housing and other land uses, and/or the size of the area being fed into the calculation
- 🏠 What works in your area and the type of scheme and densities you feel can be accommodated



- 🏠 What improvements might be required to the wider area if there are more residents, workers or visitors
- 🏠 The fact that car parking uses a great deal of space, with a significant impact on density figures

Top – This distinctive corner block provides generous balconies, providing natural surveillance of the street and pleasant amenity spaces



Materials

Materials are the matter from which a development – buildings, structures and spaces – is made. The texture, colour and pattern of materials can all influence a developments' impact on the people who see it and use it, at the scale of individual buildings and the wider townscape.

Ask to see the materials proposed to be used to understand what they are made of, where they are from, and if they are of good quality and will last well. Use planning conditions to insist on the use of these specific materials to ensure that you get what you approved.



Above – Careful detailing and choice of materials can create distinctive places. St Chad's, Tilbury, Essex

Left – Provides eight one bed apartments in a tight infill site, minimising overlooking to existing homes, Challenger Court, Bistol



Think about:

- 🏠 Whether the materials are appropriate for the way in which they are to be used, whether they will last, and if they will be practical to clean and maintain
- 🏠 Whether the materials relate well to the style and design ethos of the scheme; for example, whether traditional materials are being used for a sleek, minimalist modern style, or new materials for a vernacular approach
- 🏠 Whether the materials complement those used in the surrounding area
- 🏠 Whether the materials are locally sourced and will weather well in the local climate and air quality

Detail

How well a development works, and its impact on the people who use and experience it, will be influenced significantly by the detail: by the skill applied to its detailed design, by how its parts fit together, and by the care with which it is built.

Think about:

- 🏠 The detailing might be what people will notice first about the new building or place, so secure specified materials in the planning permission.
- 🏠 The care given to detailing a scheme illustrates the developer's approach and the long-term interest that they have in the quality of the area
- 🏠 Detailing and materials go hand in hand. Some materials offer better opportunities for careful detailing than others
- 🏠 Detailing can add visual depth, interest and individual character to both buildings and spaces. Window reveals, for example, give shadow and texture
- 🏠 Detailing can mask less appealing functional requirements, such as binstores and drains
- 🏠 Good brick detailing can add something special to a scheme, eliciting interest, acceptance and pride

Below – Blackfriars Circus using glazed tiles and brick detailing, London



Part 3

Things to watch out for

Taking into account aspects of form, how convenient your neighbourhood is to get around and how buildings relate to each other in scale, density and the materials and detailing, you will also be considering the characteristics common to successful places.

Here we consider basic design principles to look out for in the design of housing and streets. Planning policies can help to retain or create successful neighbourhoods. Your local plan will reflect local context, and other local plan documents will have further detail about what constitutes local identity and a sense of place.

Housing design

Having a roof over our heads is a fundamental human requirement. Making sure our homes are well designed can help to bring communities and neighbours together, support health and well-being, and reduce levels of crime and anti-social behaviour.

Better designed homes potentially benefit both developers and residents. Inventive and creative layouts can sometimes fit more dwellings on sites without jeopardising quality or character, while practical and durable materials, internal configurations and detailing can reduce maintenance and management costs. Housing should be durable, fit for purpose and beautiful.

Councillors can scrutinise housing schemes to ensure that quality is not being sacrificed for quantity. For example, policy in most authorities calls for homes to have windows facing in more than one direction (dual aspect) to ensure that those living in higher density neighbourhoods have sufficient light and ventilation, and that rooms have a variety of outlooks.



The following issues can help determine how well a place works:

Front-to-front and back-to-back

Most homes (and most buildings) have a public 'front' and a private 'back'. In the home the front door, the hall and a living space tend to be at the front, and the more private bedrooms and bathrooms at the back. Layouts that put the backs facing the backs of other homes, and fronts facing other fronts, tend to reinforce these uses of space, keeping the noise and activity to the front, and the peace and privacy to the back. This is helped by the type of open space located between and around the homes.

A public street between the fronts of homes can be the focus for comings and goings. Private gardens between the backs, by contrast, can uphold their quiet nature, without access for visitors or service vehicles. This traditional arrangement tends to work well. It can work in three dimensions too, with the private rooms and open spaces above the more public facing ones.

Active frontages

Doors and windows help to make frontages active, and they help buildings to give an impression of life, rather than the lifelessness of blank facades. Buildings with active frontages are accessed from the street front, and windows support that access. This gives the impression that the street is in constant use and is overlooked, making it less liable to experience anti-social behaviour such as urinating in the street or petty crime such as vandalism.

Careful housing design is needed to ensure that internal privacy and active overlooking from the home are both secured.

Waste storage and collection

Waste storage and collection have become a significant design issue for residential neighbourhoods since the arrival of the wheelie bin and the separation of waste for recycling. Today it is common in some neighbourhoods for residents to have three or more 240-litre wheelie bins. To complicate matters further, each waste authority has its own policy for the number and types of collections for waste disposal, making it difficult for housebuilders to produce a single strategy that works from one waste authority to the next.

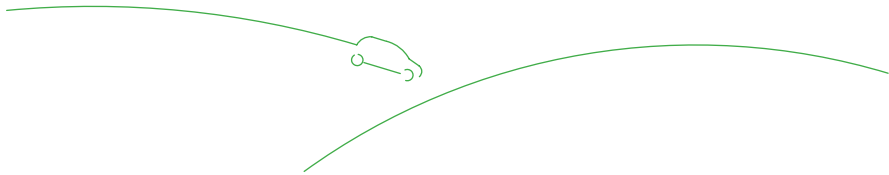
Wheelie bins can be stored in rear gardens if there is easy access from the street. If the street needs to accommodate waste storage, the use of appropriately placed and scaled modular stores, integrated with landscaping, can hide two, or more wheelie bins.

It can be useful to ask for a 'waste-walk' plan. This will show how people from each home in a development will get their waste to the bins from where it can be collected. These routes should not be excessively long, or routed through closed doors, or areas where smells or dirt from the bins could cause problems.

Buffer zones

The area between the front door and wall of the home, on the one hand, and the public thoroughfare, on the other, can often usefully be thought of as a buffer zone or defensible space. These create semi-private areas for residents, shield the privacy of ground-floor units from the street, and ensure that parking does not dominate the street scene. This space can help to protect the privacy and quiet of the home itself, preventing people from coming right up to the front windows. It can also provide space for storage and an opportunity for residents to personalise their homes. Traditionally the space is taken up with a front garden or, for a building with a basement, a light well with or without steps.

In the case of a flatted development, the buffer zone can become even more important for ground-floor residents, especially if their only, or main, windows face the street, if the ceilings are not particularly high, or if the windows are the only way of getting fresh air into the home. Privacy can be provided by thoughtful landscaping and evergreen planting.



Street design

Traditionally the remit of engineers, the design of streets is a highly important area for planners to get involved in, as streets have a major impact on the usability and success of places. Streets are not the same as roads. Roads are mainly for transit; streets, which make up the vast majority of what is generally called the public highway, are about much more.

The main problem with many streets is that they have been designed as though their chief purpose were the movement of motor vehicles. Consequently they fail to achieve their full potential to serve buildings and their occupants, to enable people to move around on foot or by bicycle, and to be places simply to stay in and enjoy.

Manual for Streets and **Manual for Streets 2** are the best reference documents for Councillors wanting to understand the differences between streets and roads, how this relates to design, and the main technical matters to consider. Pages 15-20 of **Manual for Streets** are a good place to start.

This excerpt from the government's **Planning Practice Guidance**, paragraph 008, establishes an important consideration for street design:

Development proposals should promote accessibility and safe local routes by making places that connect

appropriately with each other and are easy to move through. Attractive and well-connected permeable street networks encourage more people to walk and cycle to local destinations.'

'For this reason streets should be designed to be functional and accessible for all, to be safe and attractive public spaces and not just respond to engineering considerations. They should reflect urban design qualities as well as traffic management considerations and should be designed to accommodate and balance a locally appropriate mix of movement and place based activities.'

A balance needs to be struck between providing for movement, on the one hand, and considering any particular street as a pleasant and usable place, on the other. Most types of street and road will have both movement and place functions, but often one function will be more important than the other.

Streets must be designed with an understanding that they are complex, that their design must not relate simply to their role in carrying motor traffic, and that (most streets being contained by buildings) decisions will have to be made as to how finite street space is laid out and attributed to different uses. Planning needs to engage with such decisions because they will have a direct impact on how well buildings, towns and cities work, and for whom.

Things that make good places

- Do not let cars dominate a residential scheme. If residents are going to need cars, make sure that they are properly accommodated
- Provide clear parking areas but look for ways to reduce reliance on the car, where practical
- Practical and attractive ways of managing the storage and collection of rubbish can make a major difference to the quality of a place
- Think about how the landscaping works, how it might also provide benefits such as sustainable urban drainage (SuDS) and wildlife areas and places for meeting, play and public art
- Residents value privacy, safety, comfort and a sense of belonging. Imagine if you would like to live in the proposed scheme, or if you would be happy seeing your parents or children living there
- Homes need both private and communal space. Such space needs to be appealing, practical and durable. The same space might not be able to serve a number of different purposes successfully, for example an access route with bin stores may not be a relaxing garden
- Consider how new development might change an area's microclimate, and if new and existing space will receive adequate daylight, sunlight and good ventilation
- Think about the heritage of a place as an irreplaceable resource to be conserved in a manner appropriate to its significance, and try to create an even better place



Above and below – both examples here from Leeds and Northampton, show parking and bin storage in rear courts without natural surveillance or easy access; this creates unpleasant places more likely to experience vandalism and anti-social behaviour



When we consider how to enhance and improve our area, its housing, streets or public spaces, we can return to the basic considerations of good design:

- Will it last well, being it durable and adaptable in the long-term?
- Will it work practically for residents, workers and visitors?
- Will most people think it looks good and is beautiful?



Above – Dominance of road space for traffic makes it harder for pedestrians to cross



Above – Without any buffer zone or defensible space consider how this room will be used and if residents will feel safe and secure

Glossary

Article 4 direction: A direction that withdraws automatic planning permission granted by the General Permitted Development Order.

character appraisal: Techniques for assessing the qualities of places, particularly conservation areas.

charrette: A design workshop; an event (ranging from a couple of hours to several days) that brings together a group of people to design and plan.

community infrastructure levy: A levy allowing local authorities to raise funds from owners or developers of land undertaking new building projects in their area.

community right to build order: An order made by the local planning authority that grants planning permission for a site-specific development proposal or classes of development.

conservation (for heritage policy): The process of maintaining and managing change to a heritage asset in a way that sustains and, where appropriate, enhances its significance.

conservation area: One designated by a local authority as possessing special architectural or historical interest. Buildings in a conservation area have extra protection against alterations to their appearance. The council will seek to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of such areas.

construction management plan: A document in which a developer describes all construction activity relating to a development in order to minimise the impact of the construction work on its surrounding neighbours.

design code: A set of illustrated design requirements that provide specific, detailed parameters for the physical development of a site or area. The graphic and written components of the code should build on a design vision, such as a masterplan or other

design and development framework for a site or area.

environmental impact assessment: A procedure to be followed for certain types of project to ensure that decisions are made in full knowledge of any likely significant effects on the environment.

heritage asset: A building, monument, site, place, area or landscape identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of its heritage interest.

historic environment: All aspects of the environment resulting from the interaction between people and places through time, including all surviving physical remains of past human activity, whether visible, buried or submerged, and landscaped and planted or managed flora.

inclusive design: Designing the built environment, including buildings and their surrounding spaces, to ensure that they can be accessed and used by everyone.

local plan: A plan for the future development of a local area, drawn up by the local planning authority in consultation with the community.

local planning authority: The public authority whose duty it is to carry out specific planning functions for a particular area.

neighbourhood development order: An order made by a local planning authority through which a parish council or neighbourhood forum can grant planning permission for a specific development proposal or classes of development.

neighbourhood plan: A plan prepared by a parish council or neighbourhood forum for a designated neighbourhood area.

open space: All open space of public value, including not just land, but also areas of water (such as rivers, canals, lakes and reservoirs).

planning condition: A condition imposed on a grant of planning permission or included in a local development order or neighbourhood development order.

planning obligation: A private agreement made between a local authority and a developer, which can be attached to a planning permission to make acceptable development which would otherwise be unacceptable in planning terms. Planning obligations are also known as Section 106 agreements.

renewable and low-carbon energy: Energy flows that occur naturally and repeatedly in the environment – from the wind, the fall of water, the movement of the oceans, the sun, and also from biomass and deep geothermal heat. Low-carbon technologies are those that can help reduce emissions (compared to conventional use of fossil fuels).

significance (for heritage policy):

The value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. The interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting.

spatial development strategy: A plan containing strategic policies prepared by a Mayor or a combined authority. It includes the London Plan and plans prepared by combined authorities that have been given equivalent plan-making powers.

speculative development: Carried out without a particular customer in mind.

supplementary planning document:

A document that adds further detail to the policies in the development plan. They can be used to provide further guidance for development on specific sites, or on particular issues, such as design. Supplementary planning documents are capable of being a material consideration in planning decisions but are not part of the development plan.

Resources

[National Planning Policy Framework](#)
[Planning Practice Guidance](#)
[Manual for Streets](#)
[Manual for Streets 2](#)

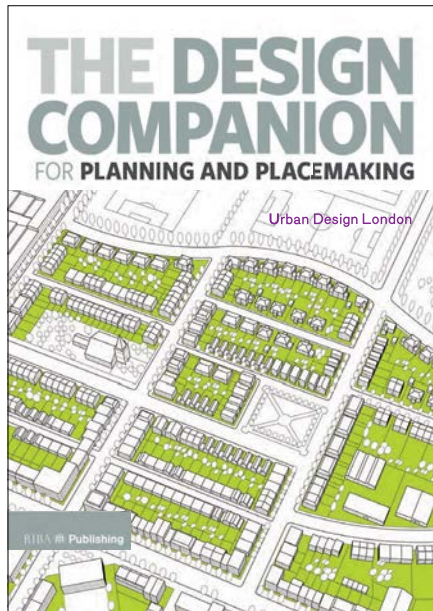
The Design Network
Building for Life 12
Place Alliance
Design for Homes
Public Practice
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For the collapsing jelly moulds, our thanks to MDAG.



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