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Guidance

Design

Provides advice on the key points to take into account on design.

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The importance of good design

Why does good design matter?

Good quality design is an integral part of sustainable development. The National Planning Policy Framework recognises that design quality matters and that planning should drive up standards across all forms of development. As a core planning principle, plan-makers and decision takers should always seek to secure high quality design.

Achieving good design is about creating places, buildings, or spaces that work well for everyone, look good, last well, and will adapt to the needs of future generations.

Good design responds in a practical and creative way to both the function and identity of a place. It puts land, water, drainage, energy, community, economic, infrastructure and other such resources to the best possible use – over the long as well as the short term.

Paragraph: 001 Reference ID: 26-001-20140306

Revision date: 06 03 2014

What does good design achieve?

Good design should:

- ensure that development can deliver a wide range of planning objectives
- enhance the quality buildings and spaces, by considering amongst other things form and function; efficiency and effectiveness and their impact on well being
- address the need for different uses sympathetically.

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How is good design delivered through plan making?

Local planning authorities should secure design quality through the policies adopted in their local plans. Good design is indivisible from good planning, and should be at the heart of the plan making process.

The National Planning Policy Framework requires Local Plans to develop robust and comprehensive policies setting out the quality of development that will be expected for the area. Local planning authorities will need to evaluate and understand the defining characteristics of the area as part of its evidence base, in order to identify appropriate design opportunities and policies.

These design policies will help in developing the vision for an area. They will assist in selecting sites and assessing their capacity for development. They will be useful in working up town centre strategies, and in developing sustainable transport solutions; all aimed at securing high quality design for places, buildings and spaces.

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How can good design guide planning and development proposals?

Development proposals should reflect the requirement for good design set out in national and local policy. Local planning authorities will assess the design quality of planning proposals against their Local Plan policies, national policies and other material considerations.

Local planning authorities are required to take design into consideration and should refuse permission for development of poor design. Local planning authorities should give great weight to outstanding or innovative designs which help to raise the standard of design more generally in the area. This could include the use of innovative construction materials and techniques. Planning permission should not be refused for buildings and infrastructure that promote high levels of sustainability because of concerns about incompatibility with an existing townscape, if those concerns have been mitigated by good design (unless the concern relates to a designated heritage asset and the impact would cause material harm to the asset or its setting which is not outweighed by the proposal's economic, social and environmental benefits).

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Who has the skills to judge good design?

By establishing sound, clear and easy to follow design policies and processes for use by both developers and local communities, local planning authorities can make design a more transparent and accessible part of the planning process.

To achieve good design the use of expert advice from appropriately skilled in house staff or consultants may sometimes be required. But design should not be the preserve of specialists, it is also important to seek the views of local communities.

Related policy on the National Planning Policy Framework (<https://gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework/7-requiring-good-design/#para63>)

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What planning objectives can good design help achieve?

Design impacts on how people interact with places. Although design is only part of the planning process it can affect a range of economic, social and environmental objectives beyond the requirement for good design in its own right. Planning policies and decisions should seek to ensure the physical environment supports these objectives. The following issues should be considered:

- local character (including landscape setting)
- safe, connected and efficient streets
- a network of greenspaces (including parks) and public places
- crime prevention
- security measures
- access and inclusion
- efficient use of natural resources
- cohesive and vibrant neighbourhoods

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Planning should promote local character (including landscape setting)

Development should seek to promote character in townscape and landscape by responding to and reinforcing locally distinctive patterns of development, local man-made and natural heritage and culture, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation.

The successful integration of all forms of new development with their surrounding context is an important design objective, irrespective of whether a site lies on the urban fringe or at the heart of a town centre.

When thinking about new development the site's land form should be taken into account. Natural features and local heritage resources can help give shape to a development and integrate it into the wider area, reinforce and sustain local distinctiveness, reduce its impact on nature and contribute to a sense of place. Views into and out of larger sites should also be carefully considered from the start of the design process.

Local building forms and details contribute to the distinctive qualities of a place. These can be successfully interpreted in new development without necessarily restricting the scope of the designer. Standard solutions rarely create a distinctive identity or make best use of a particular site. The use of local materials, building methods and details can be an important factor in enhancing local distinctiveness when used in evolutionary local design, and can also be used in more contemporary design. However, innovative design should not be discouraged.

The opportunity for high quality hard and soft landscape design that helps to successfully integrate development into the wider environment should be carefully considered from the outset, to ensure it complements the architecture of the proposals and improves the overall quality of townscape or landscape. Good landscape design can help the natural surveillance of an area, creatively help differentiate public and private space and, where appropriate, enhance security.

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Planning should promote safe, connected and efficient streets

Many of our streets already exist and the way they are changed or managed will not fall within planning controls. However large scale developments are likely to include new streets, while significant buildings or land use changes in established areas may change their nature and function, requiring alterations to existing streets.

Planning policies and decisions should look to create streets that support the character and use of the area. This means considering both their role as transport routes and their importance as local public spaces to accommodate non travel activities.

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.

For example, boulevards which include service lanes, can support continuous frontage development by providing direct access to buildings and the parking and place based activities they generate, whilst still providing a high level of traffic capacity within the central lanes. Similarly Home Zones are one way to achieve a good balance between the needs of the local community and drivers in residential streets, by allowing through vehicle movement at low speeds, prioritising walking and cycling as travel modes and providing space for residents to meet, relax and play.

Streets should also be designed to support safe behaviours, efficient interchange between travel modes and the smooth and efficient flow of traffic. The transport user hierarchy should be applied within all aspects of street design – consider the needs of the most vulnerable users first: pedestrians, then cyclists, then public transport users, specialist vehicles like ambulances and finally other motor vehicles.

More people on the street can lead to improved personal security and road safety. Research shows that the presence of pedestrians causes drivers to travel more slowly and safely. Development layouts where buildings and trees frame and enclose streets, higher visual prominence of pedestrians and shorter site lines may all be helpful in supporting road safety.

Roads within a development which are built to adoptable standards, rather than being locked into estate management agreements (which inhibit change), are likely to allow a greater variety of uses to be developed over time.

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Planning should promote a network of greenspaces (including parks) and public places

Development should promote public spaces and routes that are attractive, accessible, safe, uncluttered and work effectively for all users – including families, disabled people and elderly people. A system of open and green spaces that respect natural features and are easily accessible can be a valuable local resource and helps create successful places. A high quality landscape, including trees and semi-natural habitats where appropriate, makes an important contribution to the quality of an area.

Public spaces should be designed with a purpose in mind, and wherever possible deliver a range of social and environmental goals. They can take many different forms (for example path, street, square, park, plaza, green), and can serve different functions (for example informal, civic, recreational, commercial). Space left over after development, without a function, is a wasted resource, can detract from a place's sense of identity and can increase the likelihood of crime and anti-social behaviour occurring (a function could include informal spaces and design elements that add character, and should not be limited only formal functional uses). The benefit of greenspaces will be enhanced if they are integrated into a wider green network (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/natural-environment#para027>) of walkways, cycleways, open spaces and natural and river corridors.

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Planning should address crime prevention

Designing out crime and designing in community safety should be central to the planning and delivery of new development. Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/37/section/17>) requires all local authorities to exercise their functions with due regard to their likely effect on crime and disorder, and to do all they reasonably can to prevent crime and disorder. The prevention of crime and the enhancement of community safety are matters that a local authority should consider when exercising its planning functions under the Town and Country Planning legislation. Local authorities may, therefore, wish to consider how they will consult their Police and Crime Commissioners on planning applications where they are Statutory Consultees and agree with their police force how they will work effectively together on other planning matters.

Crime should not be seen as a stand alone issue, to be addressed separately from other design considerations. That is why guidance on crime has been embedded throughout the guidance on design rather than being set out in isolation.

It is important that crime reduction-based planning measures are based upon a clear understanding of the local situation, avoiding making assumptions about the problems and their causes. Consideration also needs to be given to how planning policies relate to wider policies on crime reduction, crime prevention and sustainable communities. This means working closely with the police force to analyse and share relevant information and good practice. Further information can be obtained from the Police.uk website (<https://www.police.uk/>).

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Planning should promote appropriate security measures

Taking proportionate security measures should be a central consideration to the planning and delivery of new developments and substantive retrofits. Crime includes terrorism, and good counter terrorism protective security is also good crime prevention.

The UK faces a significant threat from international terrorism. The current assessed threat level to the UK can be found on the MI5 website (<https://www.mi5.gov.uk/threat-levels>) where more information can also be found on what threat levels mean, who decides the level of threat and how the threat level system is used.

Where there is an identified risk, local planning authorities should work with police and other partners to ensure that an appropriate local strategy is in place to guide proposals for higher risk buildings and spaces where they exist. The objective is to create safer places and buildings that are less vulnerable to terrorist attack and, should an attack take place, where people are better protected from its impact.

Pre-application discussions between security advisors such as Counter Terrorism Security Advisors and police Crime Prevention Design Advisors will ensure that applicants are aware right at the beginning of the design process of the level of risk and the sorts of measures available to mitigate this risk in a proportionate and well-designed manner. Advice on the matters to take in to account when considering the risk of terrorist attack, the proportionate response to that risk, and how best to integrate counter-terrorism protective security measures as part of good building and urban design can be found in *Protecting crowded places: design and technical issues* (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/protecting-crowded-places-design-and-technical-issues>).

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Planning should promote access and inclusion

An inclusive environment is one that can be accessed and used by everyone. It recognises and accommodates differences in the way people use the built environment.

Good design can help to create buildings and places that are for everyone. Planning can help break down unnecessary physical barriers and exclusions caused by the poor design of buildings and places.

Inclusive design acknowledges diversity and difference and is more likely to be achieved when it is considered at every stage of the development process, from inception to completion. However it is often mistakenly seen as a Building Regulations issue, to be addressed once planning permission has been granted, not at the planning application stage. The most effective way to overcome conflicting policies and to maximise accessibility for everyone is for all parties to consider inclusive design from the outset of the process. This is particularly important when considering historic buildings and conservation, and highways. Thinking at the design stage about how the completed building will be occupied and managed can overcome many barriers experienced by some users. Too often the needs of users, including disabled people, older people and families with small children, are considered too late in the day.

Inclusive design should not only be specific to the building, but also include the setting of the building in the wider built environment, for example, the location of the building on the plot; the gradient of the plot; the relationship of adjoining buildings; and the transport infrastructure.

Issues to consider include:

- proximity and links to public transport;
- parking spaces and setting down points in proximity to entrances;
- the positioning and visual contrast of street furniture and the design of approach routes to meet the needs of wheelchair users and people with visual impairments; and
- whether entrances to buildings are clearly identified, can be reached by a level or gently sloping approach and are well lit.

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Planning should promote efficient use of natural resources

The structure, layout and design of places can help reduce their resource requirements in terms of energy demands, water and land take, and help to sustain natural ecosystems. Having a mix of uses and facilities within a neighbourhood can reduce travel demand and energy demands.

Ensuring a place is durable and adaptable will help make it less resource hungry over time. For example the layout of infrastructure servicing development (including water supply, sewerage, drainage, gas, electricity, cable, telephone, roads, footpaths, cycle ways and parks) should take account of foreseeable changes in demand to reduce the need for expensive future changes.

The layout and design of buildings and planting can reduce energy and water use and mitigate against flooding, pollution and over heating.

Passive solar design is the siting and design of buildings to maximise the use of the sun's energy for heating and cooling. Passive solar design takes advantage of natural characteristics in building materials and air to help reduce the additional energy needed for heating and cooling. Policies can encourage sites to be planned to permit good solar access to as many buildings as possible. The potential benefits of

passive solar design can only be realised by careful siting and layout. For example, access roads could predominantly run east-west, with local distributors running north-south and glazing minimised on north facing elevations to reduce heat loss.

Passive solar design principles can be applied equally effectively in housing and commercial developments. It is important that passive design considers the potential for overheating in the summer, as well as reducing need for heating in the winter.

A range of design solutions can be considered to help avoid overheating and the need for air conditioning. For example, high levels of thermal mass, maximising natural ventilation, passive cooling using planting for shade, roof overhangs to provide shade for high-sun angles, and smart glazing materials. The urban heat island effect can be reduced by, for example, allowing sufficient space between buildings, tree planting, shading and street layouts which encourage air flow and using light and reflective surfaces or vegetation on buildings.

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Planning should promote cohesive and vibrant neighbourhoods

Cohesion relies on a neighbourhood having a robust structure and identity. Local and neighbourhood plans can set aspirations for areas considering what is already successful about them and how they could be improved. This might include movement networks, the mix of uses and tenures, the amount and position of open space and local vernacular building materials and styles.

The health, wellbeing and quality of life of those who will be using an area will be influenced by its cohesion.

The vitality of neighbourhoods is enhanced by creating variety, choice and a mix of uses to attract people to live, work and play in the same area. Interesting and safe neighbourhoods often have a mix of uses which involves different people using the same parts of a building or place at different times of the day, as well as different uses happening in various parts of a building or space at the same time.

Neighbourhoods should also cater for a range of demographic groups especially families and older people.

A mix of uses will be successful when they are compatible one with another and interact with each other positively avoiding opportunities for conflict. To encourage a mix of uses that are both vibrant and safe buildings can be designed so as to facilitate different access arrangements at different times.

Paragraph: 014 Reference ID: 26-014-20140306

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What is a well designed place?

Well designed places are successful and valued. They exhibit qualities that benefit users and the wider area. Well designed new or changing places should:

- be functional;
- support mixed uses and tenures;
- include successful public spaces;
- be adaptable and resilient;
- have a distinctive character;
- be attractive; and
- encourage ease of movement.

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A well designed place is functional

A building or place should be fit for purpose, designed and delivered in a way that delivers the intended function and achieves value for money in terms of lifetime costs. It should be intuitive, comfortable, safe and equally easy for all to use. It should relate well to its environmental circumstances so that occurrences such as flooding, temperature extremes and air pollution do not prevent it from being used.

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A well designed place supports mixed uses and tenures

A good mix of uses and tenures is often important to making a place economically and socially successful, ensuring the community has easy access to facilities such as shops, schools, clinics, workplaces, parks, play areas, pubs or cafés. This helps achieve multiple benefits from the use of land, and encourage a healthier environment, reducing the need for travel and helping greater social integration. A mix of uses also allows communities and places to respond to change more readily by allowing a turnover of activities, for example with the same building or space performing different functions across a day, week or season.

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A well designed public space is lively

Public spaces are available for everyone to see, use, enjoy, (eg streets, squares and parks). They help bring neighbourhoods together, and provide space for social activities and civic life. They also provide access, light, air and the setting for buildings. The position, design and detailing of public space is central to how it provides benefits for the wider community. The most successful spaces exhibit functional and attractive hard and soft landscape elements, with well orientated and detailed routes and include facilities such as seats and play equipment. Public art and sculpture can play an important role in making interesting and exciting places that people enjoy using.

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A well designed place is adaptable and resilient

Successful places can adapt to changing circumstances and demands. They are flexible and are able to respond to a range of future needs, for example, in terms of working and shopping practices and the requirements of demographic and household change. Buildings often need to change their use over time, for example from offices to housing. Designing buildings that can be adapted to different needs offers real benefits in terms of the use of resources and the physical stability of an area. Design features such as the position and scale of entrances and circulation spaces, and the ability of the construction to be modified, can affect how easily buildings can adapt to new demands. Places that are easy and practical to manage well tend to be more resilient. For example, where maintenance and policing are supported by good access, natural surveillance and hard wearing, easy to repair, materials.

Paragraph: 019 Reference ID: 26-019-20140306

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A well designed space has a distinctive character

Distinctiveness is what often makes a place special and valued. It relies on physical aspects such as:

- the local pattern of street blocks and plots;
- building forms;
- details and materials;
- style and vernacular;
- landform and gardens, parks, trees and plants; and
- wildlife habitats and micro-climates.

Distinctiveness is not solely about the built environment – it also reflects an area's function, history, culture and its potential need for change.

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A well designed space is attractive

The way a place looks, sounds, feels, and even smells, affects its attractiveness and long term success. Streetscapes, landscapes, buildings and elements within them all have an influence. So too can more transient elements – such as the way sunshine and shadows move across an area or the way it is maintained and cleaned. Composition of elements and the relationship between colours, textures, shapes and patterns are all important, as is the depth of views, particularly across roofscapes or between buildings.

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A well designed space promotes ease of movement

The ability to move safely, conveniently and efficiently to and within a place will have a great influence on how successful it is. The experience for all users, whatever their mobility or mode of transport are important. A place should have an appropriate number of routes to and through it, not too many to make it anonymous but enough to allow easy legitimate movement. How direct and understandable these are, how closely they fit with desired lines of travel, and how well they connect with each other and destinations will all influence the success of the place.

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How should buildings and the spaces between them be considered?

Plans, policies and decisions can effectively manage physical form at a variety of scales. This is how planning can help achieve good design and connected objectives. Where appropriate the following should be considered:

- layout – the way in which buildings and spaces relate to each other
- form – the shape of buildings
- scale – the size of buildings
- detailing – the important smaller elements of building and spaces
- materials – what a building is made from

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Consider layout

This is how buildings, street blocks, routes and open spaces are positioned in an area and how they relate to each other. This provides the basic plan for development. Developments that endure have flexible layouts and design.

New development should look to respond appropriately to the existing layout of buildings, streets and spaces to ensure that adjacent buildings relate to each other, streets are connected, and spaces complement one another.

The layout of areas, whether existing or new, should be considered in relation to adjoining buildings, streets and spaces; the topography; the general pattern of building heights in the area; and views, vistas and landmarks into and out of the development site.

There may be an existing prevailing layout that development should respond to and potentially improve. Designs should ensure that new and existing buildings relate well to each other, that streets are connected, and spaces complement one another. This could involve following existing building lines, creating new links between existing streets or providing new public spaces.

In general urban block layouts provide an efficient template with building fronts and entrances to public spaces and their more private backs to private spaces. Such layouts minimise the creation of unsupervised and unsafe public spaces and unsafe access routes. However building frontages do not

have to be continuous or flat. Breaks and features particularly where they emphasise entrances, can be successfully incorporated.

There should be a clear definition between public and private space. A buffer zone, such as a front garden, can successfully be used between public outdoor space and private internal space to support privacy and security.

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Consider form

Buildings can be formed in many ways, for example tall towers, individual stand alone units, long and low blocks, terraces. They can all be successful, or unsuccessful, depending on where they are placed, how they relate to their surroundings, their use and their architectural and design quality.

Similarly streets can take different forms. From wide motorways with few entrances and exits to narrow lanes with many buildings accessed directly from them. Care should be taken to design the right form for the right place.

Some forms pose specific design challenges, for example how taller buildings meet the ground and how they affect local wind and sunlight patterns should be carefully considered. The length of some lower blocks can mean they disrupt local access and movement routes. Stand alone buildings can create ill defined spaces around them and terraces can appear monotonous and soulless if poorly designed.

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Consider scale

This relates both to the overall size and mass of individual buildings and spaces in relation to their surroundings, and to the scale of their parts.

Decisions on building size and mass, and the scale of open spaces around and between them, will influence the character, functioning and efficiency of an area. In general terms too much building mass compared with open space may feel overly cramped and oppressive, with access and amenity spaces being asked to do more than they feasibly can. Too little and neither land as a resource or monetary investment will be put to best use.

The size of individual buildings and their elements should be carefully considered, as their design will affect the: overshadowing and overlooking of others; local character; skylines; and vistas and views. The scale of building elements should be both attractive and functional when viewed and used from neighbouring streets, gardens and parks.

The massing of development should contribute to creating distinctive skylines in cities, towns and villages, or to respecting existing skylines. Consideration needs to be given to roof space design within the wider context, with any adverse visual impact of rooftop servicing minimised.

Account should be taken of local climatic conditions, including daylight and sunlight, wind, temperature and frost pockets.

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Consider details

The quality of new development can be spoilt by poor attention to detail. Careful consideration should be given to items such as doors, windows, porches, lighting, flues and ventilation, gutters, pipes and other rain water details, ironmongery and decorative features. It is vital not only to view these (and other) elements in isolation, but also to consider how they come together to form the whole and to examine carefully the 'joins' between the elements.

Paragraph: 027 Reference ID: 26-027-20140306

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Consider materials

Materials should be practical, durable, affordable and attractive. Choosing the right materials can greatly help new development to fit harmoniously with its surroundings. They may not have to match, but colour, texture, grain and reflectivity can all support harmony.

There are a wide range of building and open space materials available and more products developed all the time. Innovative construction materials and techniques can help to achieve well designed homes and other buildings. This could include offsite construction and manufacturing which can help to deliver energy efficient and durable buildings more quickly. Although materials and building techniques may not be specified before planning permission is granted, the functions they will be expected to perform should be clear early on.

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Which planning processes and tools can we use to help achieve good design?

In development plans:

The promotion of good design should be sought at all stages in the planning process. At the development plan stage this will be carried out through:

- careful plan and policy formulation
- the use of proper consultative and participatory techniques
- where appropriate the preparation of masterplans, briefs and site specific policies

In planning applications:

In the evolution of planning applications and proposals there are established ways in which good design can be achieved. These include:

- pre-application discussions
- design and access statements
- design review
- design codes
- decisions on applications
- the use and implementation of planning conditions and agreements

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Good plan and policy formulation

A local or neighbourhood plan is essential to achieving high quality places. A key part of any plan is understanding and appreciating the context of an area, so that proposals can then be developed to respect it. Good design interprets and builds on historic character, natural resources and the aspirations of local communities.

The National Planning Policy Framework emphasises the importance of viability. It is futile designing and planning if there is no hope of proposals being implemented. Local plans must be informed by what is deliverable. However, proper planning, including good design, is the starting point. Initial proposals should then evolve to achieve the most appropriate balance between the vision and deliverability.

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Good consultative and participatory techniques

Local communities play a vital part in good design. Those who live and work in an area often best understand the way in which places operate and their strengths. Local plans must evolve in a way that genuinely allows for local leadership and participation. Local plans should set a clear design framework. Neighbourhood plans can be used by local communities to develop their vision of how their area should look, feel and function.

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Good masterplans and briefs

Masterplans can set out the strategy for a new development including its general layout and scale and other aspects that may need consideration. The process of developing masterplans will include testing out options and considering the most important parameters for an area such as the mix of uses, requirement for open space or transport infrastructure, the amount and scale of buildings, and the quality of buildings.

Masterplans can show these issues in an indicative layout and massing plan where the shape and position of buildings, streets and parks is set out. Masterplans can sometimes be submitted for outline planning permission or they can be adopted as local policy requirements.

Care should be taken to ensure that masterplans are viable and well understood by all involved. In particular graphical impressions of what the development will look like should not mislead the public by showing details not yet decided upon as certainties.

Masterplans, briefs and site policies can stay in place for a long time. They need to be flexible enough to adapt to changing circumstances.

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Using pre application discussion

Pre application discussions are an opportunity to discuss the design policies, requirements and parameters that will be applied to a site. The local authority can explain the design issues they feel are most important and the developer can explain their own objectives and aspirations. Being able to inform and influence the design of a proposed development early in the design process is more efficient than trying to implement suggested revisions at a later stage – particularly if this relates to a major proposal.

The local authority may draw their comments from in house appropriately skilled and experienced staff, external consultants or design review panels. The local planning authority should consider offering design review when appropriate, as part of their pre-application service.

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Using design and access statements

A Design and Access Statement is a concise report accompanying certain applications for planning permission and applications for listed building consent. They provide a framework for applications to explain how the proposed development is a suitable response to the site and its setting and demonstrate that it can be adequately accessed by prospective users. Information on what applications must be accompanied by a Design and Access statement and what they should include can be found here.

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Using Design review

Design Review is a tried and tested method of promoting good design and is an effective way to improve quality. Local planning authorities should have local design review arrangements in place to provide assessment of proposals and to support high standards of design. Local authorities should, when

appropriate, refer major projects for a national design review. Design review is most effective if done at the early stages of an application, and in many cases local authorities charge for this as part of a pre-application service.

Local authorities can source design reviews in a variety of ways. They could, for example, choose to appoint their own design review panel or share resources with other local authorities or outsource to external organisations.

Developers can apply for planning permission without going through a design review panel. However schemes that have been through the design review process, and have developed positively in response to the recommendations from the design review panel, are less likely to be refused planning permission on the grounds of poor design.

The purpose of design review is to improve the design quality of new development. In assessing applications, local planning authorities should have regard to the recommendations from the design review panel.

Related policy on the National Planning Policy Framework (<https://gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework/7-requiring-good-design/#local-design-review>)

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Using design codes

A design code is a type of detailed design guidance that is particularly useful for complex scenarios involving multiple parties in long-term development. A code can be a way of simplifying the processes associated with new development to give more certainty to all those involved and help to make high quality places. Code preparation can allow organisations and local communities to work together more effectively, helping to build consensus about what kind of place everyone wants to create.

Design codes vary mainly according to their level of prescription (what they fix and what they leave flexible) and the scale at which they operate. They may be appropriate for use on an area basis to shape new build development. They can be applied to all development types including residential, commercial, mixed use, redevelopment of parts of towns or cities, open space, landscape or public realm requirements. Design codes can be used in other situations. For example, they may be appropriate to guide the design of repetitive minor householder planning applications such as house extensions, alterations, and the like in a particular locality. They often link to adopted masterplans.

Preparing a good code is about finding a balance between technical specificity and a succinct description of what is required. Some of the best and most effective codes are very short.

Design codes seek to capture the specific requirements of a place and encourage interested parties to think together about each development in its entirety as a unique place.

Local planning authorities and developers should consider using design codes where they could help deliver high quality outcomes where for example:

- they wish to coordinate design outcomes across large or complex sites to deliver a coherent locally agreed vision;
- wish to ensure consistency across large sites which may be in multiple ownership and/or where development is to be phased and more than one developer and design team is likely to be involved;

Codes can also be used by applicants when submitting a planning application, if there is a need to retain some flexibility on the final design of the development (eg if the development is a self/custom build housing scheme where the final design of homes depends on the preferences of future home owners).

To promote speed of implementation, avoid stifling responsible innovation and provide flexibility, design codes should wherever possible avoid overly prescriptive detail and encourage sense of place and variety (unless local circumstances can clearly justify a different approach).

Codes should be succinct and carefully distinguish mandatory from discretionary components, avoiding ambiguous aspirational statements, unnecessary jargon and they should define any use of key technical terms.

Although design codes are most often used as part of the planning application process they can be used at other points including:

- via formal adoption, principally through a Local Plan or neighbourhood plan;
- by being incorporated within Community Right to Build Orders or as part of a local development order or Neighbourhood Development Order; and
- by the exercise of freehold rights through development agreements and covenants.

The choice of approach depends on local circumstances and the aims and aspirations of the promoter of the code.

Paragraph: 036 Reference ID: 26-036-20140306

Revision date: 06 03 2014

Using decisions on applications

Decisions on planning applications should clearly support the design objectives in the Development Plan. If a local authority decides that an application should be refused on design grounds there should be a clear explanation of the decision.

Paragraph: 037 Reference ID: 26-037-20140306

Revision date: 06 03 2014

Using planning agreements and conditions

The design process often continues after the granting of permission. If the local authority feels that detailed design issues are central to the acceptability of a scheme, they may wish to use conditions to require these to be approved at a later date. This could be due to the sensitivity of the site, its relationship to existing properties or because permission relied on the integrity and quality of the architecture and

landscape design proposed. Whilst conditions can be used to improve the certainty of the design outcome that will be delivered, the Local Planning Authority should ensure that each condition meets the 6 tests in National Planning Policy Framework policy.

Conditions that prescribe very detailed specifications for materials (such as bricks) should not be used unless they are necessary, for example where there is a heritage or design need . Local planning authorities can avoid overly rigid conditions by building in the flexibility to allow them to permit acceptable alternatives. This is particularly useful where there may be supply shortages of materials or to encourage innovative appropriate alternative approaches (for example, off-site construction).

Paragraph: 038 Reference ID: 26-038-20140306

Revision date: 06 03 2014

Are there design issues that relate to particular types of development?

The qualities of well designed places are similar across most developments. However it is useful to consider what they can mean in practice for particular places or development types:

- housing design
- town centre design
- street design and transport corridors

Paragraph: 039 Reference ID: 26-039-20140306

Revision date: 06 03 2014

Housing design issues

Well-designed housing should be functional, attractive and sustainable. It should also be adaptable to the changing needs of its occupants.

In well-designed places affordable housing is not distinguishable from private housing by its design, nor is it banished to the least attractive part of the site.

Consideration should be given to the servicing of dwellings such as the storage of bins and bikes, access to meter boxes, space for drying clothes or places for deliveries. Such items should be carefully considered and well designed to ensure they are discreet and can be easily used in a safe way.

Unsightly bins can damage the visual amenity of an area. Carefully planned bin storage is, therefore, particularly important. Local authorities should ensure that each dwelling is carefully planned to ensure there is enough discretely designed and accessible storage space for all the different types of bin used in the local authority area (for example landfill, recycling, food waste).

In terms of parking, there are many different approaches that can support successful outcomes, such as on-street parking, in-curtilage parking and basement parking. Natural surveillance of parked cars is an important consideration. Car parking and service areas should be considered in context to ensure the most successful outcome can be delivered in each case.

Paragraph: 040 Reference ID: 26-040-20140306

Revision date: 06 03 2014

Town centre issues

Good design can help town centres by ensuring a robust relationship between uses, facilities, activities and travel options. It can also help create attractive and comfortable places people choose to visit.

Access to town centres by all modes should be supported. This could involve clear, convenient, comfortable and safe walking and cycling routes, parking facilities, bus stops and station entrances and exits.

Well integrated proposals for movement between arrival points (such as train stations, bus stops, car parks) and the town centre can help support a successful centre. Consideration should be given to moving the arrival points closer to key attractions – for example moving bus stops, relocating car parks, reconfiguring entrances and exits of stations and car parks to minimise distance from the town centre. Moving arrival points can be expensive or not possible, so using redevelopment opportunities to create more attractions and activities on sites that lie between the arrival point and the established town centre attractions should be considered.

Improvements to the walking environment within the centre can support longer visits which take in more shops and facilities. Both formal and informal crossing facilities should be provided following key desire lines as much as is practicable.

Town centre buildings should include active frontages and entrances that support town centre activities. Where appropriate they may help to diversify town centre uses and the offers they provide. The quality of signage, including that for shops and other commercial premises, is important and can enhance identity and legibility.

The quality of parking in town centres is important; it should be convenient, safe and secure. Parking charges should be appropriate and not undermine the vitality of town centres and local shops, and parking enforcement should be proportionate.

Paragraph: 041 Reference ID: 26-041-20140306

Revision date: 06 03 2014

Street design and transport corridors issues

Successful streets are those where traffic and other activities have been integrated successfully, and where buildings and spaces, and the needs of people, not just of their vehicles, shape the area.

In many cases shortcomings in street design reflect the rigid application of highway engineering standards in terms of road hierarchies, junction separation distances, sight lines and turning radii for service vehicles. The result is often a sense of sprawl and formlessness and development which contradicts some of the key principles of urban design. Imaginative and context-specific design that does not rely on conventional standards can achieve high levels of safety and amenity. Each street should be considered as unique – understand its location, character and eccentricities. Designs should relate to these local characteristics, not to something built elsewhere.

Every element of the street scene contributes to the identity of the place, including for example lighting, railings, litter bins, paving, fountains and street furniture. These should be well designed and sensitively placed. Unnecessary clutter and physical constraints such as parking bollards and road humps should be avoided. Street clutter is a blight, as the excessive or insensitive use of traffic signs and other street furniture has a negative impact on the success of the street as a place. The removal of unnecessary street clutter can, in itself, make pavements clearer and more spacious for pedestrians, including the disabled, and improve visibility and sight lines for road users. Street signs should be periodically audited with a view to identifying and removing unnecessary signs. The Department for Transport has published advice to highways authorities on reducing sign clutter (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reducing-sign-clutter>).

Public transport, and in particular interchanges, should be designed as an integral part of the street layout. The quality of design, configuration and facilities can make interchanges feel safe and easy to use, give them a sense of place to support social, economic and environmental goals, whilst also instilling a sense of civic pride in those that use them. Physical measures intended to protect and deliver security benefits, should be considered as an integral part of the design.

The likelihood of people choosing to walk somewhere is influenced not only by distance but also by the quality of the walking experience. When considering pedestrians plan for wheelchair users and people with sensory or cognitive impairments. Legible design, which makes it easier for people to work out where they are and where they are going, is especially helpful for disabled people.

Physical measures intended to protect pedestrians and road users, which can also deliver security benefits, should be secondary but considered as an integral part of the design. Barriers between the road and pedestrians are usually visually unattractive to the street scene, can form a hazard for cyclists who can be squeezed against them, and create the impression that the roads are for cars only; they should only be used when there is an overriding safety issue.

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- Planning practice guidance (<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/planning-practice-guidance>)

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- Planning system (<https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/planning-system>)