

National Design Guide

Planning practice guidance for beautiful, enduring and successful places



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government



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Part 1:

The purpose of the National Design Guide



The purpose of the National Design Guide



- 1 Places affect us all – they are where we live, work and spend our leisure time. Well-designed places influence the quality of our experience as we spend time in them and move around them. We enjoy them, as occupants or users but also as passers-by and visitors. They can lift our spirits by making us feel at home, giving us a buzz of excitement or creating a sense of delight. They have been shown to affect our health and well-being, our feelings of safety, security, inclusion and belonging, and our sense of community cohesion.
- 2 They function well, accommodating businesses, homes and a range of other uses and activities that support our everyday lives. Well-designed places can last for many years.
- 3 **The National Planning Policy Framework makes clear that creating high quality buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. This National Design Guide, and the National Model Design Code and Guidance Notes for Design Codes illustrate how well-designed places that are beautiful, healthy, greener, enduring and successful can be achieved in practice. It forms part of the Government's collection of planning practice guidance and should be read alongside the separate planning practice guidance on design process and tools.**

Introduction

4 The long-standing, fundamental principles for good design are that it is: fit for purpose; durable; and brings delight¹. It is relatively straightforward to define and assess these qualities for a building. We can identify its activities and users, the quality of detail, materials, construction and its potential flexibility. We can also make judgements about its beauty.

5 A place is more complex and multi-faceted than a building:

- it is a setting for a diverse range of uses and activities, and is experienced by many people in many different ways;
- it is made up of buildings, and also landscape and infrastructure, which are likely to endure longer than the buildings themselves;
- most places evolve over a long period of time once they have been established, with many incremental changes that can affect their quality;
- the quality of 'delight' includes a richness of experience gained from all of our senses, not only the visual; and
- beauty in a place may range from a long view down to the detail of a building or landscape.

6 The National Planning Policy Framework sets out that achieving high quality places and buildings is fundamental to the planning and development process. It also leads to improvements in the quality of existing environments. The National Planning Policy Framework expands upon the fundamental principles of good design to define what is expected for well-designed places and explain how planning policies and decisions should support this.

7 The National Planning Policy Framework is supported by a suite of planning practice guidance that is relevant to both design quality and quality in delivery. See **Part 3: References**.

8 The underlying purpose for design quality and the quality of new development at all scales is to create well-designed and well-built places that benefit people and communities. This includes people who use a place for various purposes such as:

- to live, work, shop, for leisure and recreation, and to move around between these activities; and
- those who visit or pass through.

It also includes people at different stages of life and with different abilities – children, young people, adults, families and older people, both able-bodied and disabled.

9 The National Design Guide addresses the question of how we recognise well-designed places, by outlining and illustrating the Government's priorities for well-designed places in the form of ten characteristics. See **Part 2: The ten characteristics**.

Definitions

Inclusion: Making sure that all individuals have equal access, opportunity and dignity in the use of the built environment.

Community cohesion: A sense of belonging for all communities, with connections and trust between them. Diversity is valued and people of different backgrounds have the opportunity to develop positive relationships with one another.

Design guide: A document providing guidance on how development can be carried out in accordance with good design practice, often produced by a local authority.

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 upon a design vision, such as a masterplan or other design and development framework for a site or area.

¹ Originally from Vitruvius

10 It is based on national planning policy, practice guidance and objectives for good design as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework. Specific, detailed and measurable criteria for good design are most appropriately set out at the local level. They may take the form of local design policies, design guides or design codes, prepared either by local authorities, or applicants to accompany planning applications.

How to use this design guide

11 The focus of this design guide is on good design in the planning system, so it is primarily for:

- local authority planning officers, who prepare local planning policy and guidance and assess the quality of planning applications;
- councillors, who make planning decisions;
- applicants and their design teams, who prepare applications for planning permission; and
- people in local communities and their representatives.

12 The terminology used here avoids jargon where possible. Definitions are provided where particular technical language is needed for clarity and precision.

The planning application process refers to key components of design. Together with related terms, these are defined on p.6. Otherwise definitions can generally be found in the section where the term is used for the first time.

13 In a well-designed place, an integrated design process brings the ten characteristics together in a mutually supporting way. They interact to create an overall character of place. Good design considers how a development proposal can make a contribution towards all of them. This applies to proposals of all sizes, including small scale incremental changes (such as highway works), new buildings, infill developments, major developments and larger scale developments such as urban extensions, new neighbourhoods, new settlements and infrastructure.

14 At an early stage of the design process, the relative priority for different characteristics may be discussed and agreed. The most relevant characteristics will be determined by a number of considerations:

- locally identified priorities and concerns;
- the strategic priorities of the local authority;
- the priorities of a particular user group;
- the scale of proposal;

- its site and location; and/or
- the design process, including whether it is at a strategic or detailed stage.

15 As well as helping to inform development proposals and their assessment by local planning authorities, this design guide supports paragraph 130 of the National Planning Policy Framework which states that permission should be refused for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions. The statements in this guide provide a series of tests for assessing whether a place is well-designed or not. If they are not met, then it can be concluded that it is not well-designed.

16 Well-designed places and buildings come about when there is a clearly expressed 'story' for the design concept and how it has evolved into a design proposal. This explains how the concept influences the layout, form, appearance and details of the proposed development. It may draw its inspiration from the site, its surroundings or a wider context. It may also introduce new approaches to contrast with, or complement, its context. This 'story' will inform and address all ten characteristics. It is set out in a Design and Access Statement that accompanies a planning application.

17 Local communities can play a vital role in achieving well-designed places and buildings and making sure there is a relationship between the built environment and quality of life. Communities can be involved in design processes through approaches such as co-design, design workshops and other engagement techniques, so that places and buildings reflect local community preferences, improve their quality of life and fit well into their surroundings. The design-related chapters of the planning practice guidance explain these and other design processes.

Definitions

Design concept: The basic design ideas on which a proposal will be based, often expressed in a combination of words and visual material.

Design and Access Statement: A short report accompanying and supporting a planning application. It provides a framework for applicants to explain how a proposed development is a suitable response to the site and its setting, and demonstrate that it can be adequately accessed by prospective users.

Looking forward

18 This guide has been prepared in the context of social, economic and environmental change. Technological change is rapid, with developments in digital, artificial intelligence and machine learning affecting our lives at all scales, both inside and outside the home. Demographics are also driving change, with an ageing population. Younger people's expectations are changing too. This is leading to new lifestyles and new models of home ownership. It includes more communal forms of living, such as cohousing. New models of development are also emerging, driven by advanced technologies. These include new off-site production methods, the use of digital technologies for production and customisation, and an increase in self- and custom-build.

19 We expect continuing change as a consequence of climate change, changing home ownership models and technological changes. It is likely to emerge and embed in society rapidly. It will influence the planning, design and construction of new homes and places. So, for each of the ten characteristics, a Looking Forward box identifies some issues to consider as we are thinking ahead about our places. Both local planning policies and the design process need to take these into account.

Components for good design

20 Buildings are an important component of places and proposals for built development are a focus of the development management system. However good design involves careful attention to other important components of places. These include:

- the context for places and buildings;
- hard and soft landscape;
- technical infrastructure – transport, utilities, services such as drainage; and
- social infrastructure – social, commercial, leisure uses and activities.

21 A well-designed place is unlikely to be achieved by focusing only on the appearance, materials and detailing of buildings. It comes about through making the right choices at all levels, including:

- the layout (or masterplan);
- the form and scale of buildings;
- their appearance;
- landscape;
- materials; and
- their detailing.

These components are defined overleaf.

22 All developments are made up of these components put together in a particular way. The choices made in the design process contribute towards achieving the ten characteristics and shape the character of a place.

Movement

Accessible and easy to move around



*Cycle and pedestrian movement that is well-overlooked and attractive.
Packington Estate, Islington, London.*

75 Patterns of **movement** for people are integral to well-designed places. They include walking and cycling, access to facilities, employment and servicing, parking and the convenience of public transport. They contribute to making high quality places for people to enjoy. They also form a crucial component of urban character. Their success is measured by how they contribute to the quality and character of the place, not only how well they function.

76 Successful development depends upon a movement network that makes connections to destinations, places and communities, both within the site and beyond its boundaries.

77 A well-designed movement network defines a clear pattern of streets that:

- is safe and accessible for all;
- functions efficiently to get everyone around, takes account of the diverse needs of all its potential users and provides a genuine choice of sustainable transport modes;
- limits the impacts of car use by prioritising and encouraging walking, cycling and public transport, mitigating impacts and identifying opportunities to improve air quality;
- promotes activity and social interaction, contributing to health, well-being, accessibility and inclusion; and
- incorporates green infrastructure, including street trees to soften the impact of car parking, help improve air quality and contribute to biodiversity.

M1 A connected network of routes for all modes of transport

78 A well-designed and connected network gives people the maximum choice in how to make their journeys. This includes by rail, other public transport, walking, cycling and by car.

79 In a well-designed place, all modes of transport are positively designed into the built form. They are integrated into public spaces with character that people enjoy using. People move around in attractive streets and other public spaces - parks, natural open spaces and green corridors. Well-designed streets create attractive public spaces with character, through their layout, landscape, including street trees, lighting, street furniture and materials - see **Public spaces**.

80 A clear layout and hierarchy of streets and other routes helps people to find their way around so that journeys are easy to make. Wider, more generous spaces are well-suited to busier streets, including streets served by public transport. They have enough space to create an attractive place for all users. Narrower streets are more suitable where there is limited vehicle movement and speeds are low. Mews, courtyards and culs-de-sac will generally only be appropriate at the most local level where there is little vehicular movement.

81 Higher densities are dependent upon accessibility to public transport and essential facilities. To optimise density, it may be necessary to provide public transport infrastructure or to improve existing local transport services. A transport hub may represent an opportunity for a local increase in density, where appropriate to local context and character.

M2 Active travel

82 Priority is given to pedestrian and cycle movements, subject to location and the potential to create connections. Prioritising pedestrians and cyclists mean creating routes that are safe, direct, convenient and accessible for people of all abilities. These are designed as part of attractive spaces with good sightlines, and well chosen junctions and crossings, so that people want to use them. Public rights of way are protected, enhanced and well-linked into the wider network of pedestrian and cycle routes.

83 In well-designed places, people should not need to rely on the car for everyday journeys, including getting to workplaces, shops, schools and other facilities, open spaces or the natural environment. Safe and direct routes with visible destinations or clear signposting encourage people to walk and cycle.



Well-designed places have a hierarchy of well-connected routes, such as boulevards, streets, roads, avenues, mews and courts. New developments help to reinforce or extend the movement network. For pedestrians and cyclists, direct links create good connections to public transport and promote active travel, particularly where they are along routes with low levels of vehicular traffic.