

A Design Wayfinder



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The Purpose of the Design Wayfinder

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) places a strong emphasis on good design in particular, Chapter 7 of the NPPF 'Requiring good design' sets out a number of policies which can support the delivery of good design:

“always seek to secure high quality design and a good standard of amenity...”

– Core Principles, paragraph 17

“Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, is indivisible from good planning and should contribute positively to making places better for people.”

– paragraph 56

“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”

– paragraph 64

The NPPF is deliberately short, and has swept away other policy guidance, particularly in PPS1, on design that has informed and influenced development plans and decisions on applications.

In future planning authorities, applicants (and their advisers) and local communities will be expected to take responsibility for securing good design, and for taking the opportunities available to improve the character and quality of an area. This Design Wayfinder provides help for authorities, developers and communities. It identifies the main sources of guidance and best practice on good design, on robust local plan policies on design, and the type of analysis required to decide whether proposed development is acceptable.

Plans and decisions will respond to the NPPF and to the new tier of neighbourhood planning heralded by the Localism Act 2011. This Wayfinder will be supported on the Design Council CABE website to include examples of emerging good policy approaches and analysis.

Using the Wayfinder

Good design is something that matters to people, and something they can engage with but they don't have to be experts because the principles of good design are simple. By using these principles, judging whether a plan or proposals are well designed can also be simple. This Wayfinder sets out the key principles that should be considered, summarising the more detailed guidance to which links are provided. If the principles are applied, by planning authorities, those developing and local communities, our towns and the rural environment will be better places, enhanced by well planned new development. The Wayfinder should also give authorities and communities the confidence to say "no" to development that conflicts with these principles, and fails to take the opportunities offered by the site and the area.

The Role of Design in Planning

Planning shapes the places where people live and work, and the country that we live in. Good planning means that we get the right development of the right quality in the right place at the right time. Sustainable development is the core principle underpinning planning. At the heart of sustainable development is the idea of ensuring a good quality of life for everyone, both now and for future generations. This means enabling economic growth. It also means that development must be well designed and inclusive. As the NPPF notes, good design is indivisible from good planning.

Key Aspects of Design

Good design draws together the many strands of place-making – sustainability, social equity and economic viability – into the creation of places of beauty, which function well and have a distinct identity. Volume 1 of the *Urban Design Compendium* identifies 7 aspects comprising good design:

- Create places for people – places that are well used and well loved, safe, comfortable, varied and attractive, and are clear about the extent of the public and private realms.
- Enrich the existing – new development should enrich the qualities of existing places, with distinctive responses that complement its setting, respect the grain of the area and acknowledge local character.
- Make connections – being easy to access, inclusive and permeable, as well as being integrated, physically and visually, with the surroundings.
- Work with landscape – striking a balance between the natural and man made environments, using each site's intrinsic resources with care
- Mix uses and forms – providing stimulating, enjoyable and convenient places for a variety of demands from a range of users at different times of the day.
- Manage the investment – with an economic heart that will ensure that it is well managed and maintained, which helps secure the vitality and viability of the communities in which they sit and the infrastructure that serves those communities.
- Design for change – flexible enough to respond to future changes in use, lifestyle and demography.

Volume 2 of the *Compendium* sets out the key stages of delivering quality places, identifying how the planning and design process is integrated with the process of attracting investors.

Design and Development Plans

The most critical 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. Local communities should be reinforced by good design.

Good design arrives at a realistic and viable vision of what a place might become. To do so it has to consider inter-relationships in the local environment. It has to look at the links between spaces, urban and rural, at the level of the town as well as block by block. It has to review connections, and how movement takes place, on foot, by bike, by car and by public transport. It has to review the detail of the interfaces between buildings and the public realm. It has to ensure that there is an inherent quality that will last beyond completion of construction of any particular building. *By Design* introduces the tools that are needed to develop a good local plan. *Planning for Places* outlines potential approaches to policy led good design, drawing on best practice from around the country. Design needs to address area wide as well as site specific issues. *Urban Design Compendium*

Volume 2 also provides useful guidance on how to develop sound design policy for places as a whole.

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, within their strategic policies, that can then guide the development of neighbourhood plans. Neighbourhood plans can be used by local communities to develop their visions of how their areas should look, feel and function.

The NPPF rightly 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 be viability tested, and plans should then evolve to achieve the most appropriate balance between the vision and deliverability. Neither should result in the sacrifice of the other.

Development Management

A well designed place will combine functionality (does it work?), firmness (will it last?) and delight (does it look good?). It will respect context and, if there is a local plan, will normally be in accordance with the planned aspirations of the local community. To secure good design, discussions with the planning authority and local community need to start early, at the concept stage and carry on through pre-application discussions.

By Design provides useful illustrations of the main components of building form that will need to be considered, building on the foundations of character, context, urban structure and urban grain. Issues that will need to be analysed include:

- Density and mix: this influences the intensity of development, and the effect that it will have on both neighbours and the wider area. Will the proposals complement the surroundings?
- Scale and height: the size of the building in relation to its surroundings, or the size of the building and its details, particularly in relation to the size of a person – is it human in scale? Height is an important component of the

impact of the development on views, vistas and skylines, all important parts of the public realm.

- Scale and massing: the combined effect of the arrangement, volume and shape of a building or group of buildings in relation to other buildings and spaces. Will the proposals be coherent in context?
- Appearance: materials: the texture, colour, pattern and durability of materials and how they are used. How do they relate to their neighbours, the local environment and the culture of the place?
- Appearance details: do the proposals show the craftsmanship, building techniques, decoration, lighting and style of a building. Can the choice of building material and approach be understood?

There are a number of evaluation approaches and frameworks available. The *CABE Evaluation* paper provides a useful outline of the approach adopted in *Design Review* by Design Council Cobe, and its national network of affiliated panels. This is a model that could be used

Development Management

locally to assess proposals following the *Design Review: Principles of Practice*

Where new housing is proposed *By Design Better Places to Live* provides further advice on these principles. *Building for Life* is a useful tool for assessing and understanding whether the proposal is well-designed. Although focussed on new residential development it sets out 20 broad criteria that can be applied to most forms of development. More advice, on all types of development, is contained in both volumes of the *Urban Design Compendium*.

Streets and the Public Realm

The streetscape is a key element of our surroundings, and a real understanding of it should inform the development plan and decisions on applications. The *Manual for Streets* sets out the core principles that relate the way in which we move around to good design policies in development plans and to better new developments:

- Streets should help to build and strengthen the communities that they serve, being flexible in use, active, attractive and with their own distinct identity.

- Streets should meet the needs of all users, inclusively and as part of a well-connected network
- Reflect a clear and easily understood hierarchy.

Design and Access Statements

A Design and Access Statement (DAS) should support each planning application. These should be succinct and proportionate. Indeed, long statements often betray confusion about what is being proposed. A statement should cover the relationship of the proposals with the aspirations of local plan and the design policies within it. It should address the key aspects of design identified above and then describe the proposals, analysing the important elements of the proposed design. *Design and Access Statements* sets out guidance on what should be contained in a good DAS and how that should be used by both local planning authorities and communities.

Continuing Support

This Wayfinder has been produced by Design Council Cobe with endorsement from the Planning Officers Society, Royal Town Planning Institute, Royal Institute of British Architects and Landscape Institute.

Design Council Cobe is available to provide assistance on design issues. Their website has links to over 50 reports and research papers that look at individual elements of good design, ranging from community involvement in design to the best design approach to supermarkets.

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References

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