Achieving Building for Life

HATC Limited

CABE
Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment

HOUSING CORPORATION

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Contents

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Foreword

Richard Simmons
Chief Executive
CABE

The design quality of new homes and neighbourhoods is key to our daily quality of life. CABE's mission is to encourage developers, housing providers, designers and policy makers to create places that are safe, attractive and efficient to sustain. Since 2003 Building for Life has made a major contribution to achieving that mission, both through the standard and the awards which showcase exemplar schemes.

The 20 criteria which make up the Building for Life standard are proving an increasingly useful tool for evaluating new housing developments during the design and planning stages. A growing number of local planning authorities are integrating Building for Life into their planning policy framework. This means that clients and design teams are using Building for Life in design and access statements as a way of ensuring that the planning discussion about design quality can be rooted in relevant evidence.

As a partner in the Building for Life initiative, the Housing Corporation has built on this progress by including the Building for Life standard in its Design and Quality Standards. With this document the Housing Corporation is providing very valuable guidance to help key decision makers use the Building for Life criteria to deliver great new places to live.

I recommend this guide to affordable housing providers and other clients who are aiming to design for success.

Preface

Steven Douglas
Chief Executive
Housing Corporation

In April 2007 we adopted the Building for Life criteria to underpin our external environment expectations within the new Design and Quality Standards publication. At the same time we amended our Housing Quality Indicators (HQIs) measurement tool to match. As a result, all new schemes within the Housing Corporation's 2008-11 National Affordable Housing Programme, the largest affordable housing programme to date, have been assessed against the Building for Life criteria. Our ongoing verification processes and audit arrangements are in place to ensure that the design quality committed to at grant allocation stage is delivered on the ground.

To achieve a common understanding of how to interpret the criteria, we have been working with CABE on its new Building for Life online assessment tool for clients, architects and urban designers. The tool is available on CABE's website.

However, we are conscious that many of the decisions that influence the extent to which the Building for Life criteria will be met are taken at early feasibility stage by staff and management of housing providers. It is important therefore that they understand the processes and factors needed to maximise the opportunities to deliver great places to live.

It is against this backdrop, and responding to requests for guidance and advice, that we commissioned HATC, in liaison with CABE, to provide this particular guidance aimed specifically at staff of housing associations and our other development partners. To ensure that the guidance responds to their needs, representatives of housing associations have been closely involved in the work, including contributing to several regional seminars/working groups.

We believe that this publication strikes a reasonable balance between the need to be readily understood and to meet CABE's benchmarks for acceptability robustly. What it does not, nor is intended to do, is to set additional standards – it is merely guidance on how the published Building for Life criteria may be achieved.

We hope that this guidance will enable affordable housing providers to respond positively and confidently to the challenges of providing attractive sustainable places that work well for residents and provide a lasting quality legacy.

Introduction

Background to the guide

This guide has been produced with Innovation and Good Practice grant support from the Housing Corporation. It follows the adoption by the Corporation of Building for Life as part of its design and quality standards. It was recognised that existing guidance on Building for Life was aimed at a readership of urban designers and architects, and that it therefore assumed a shared understanding of terminology, concepts and processes. That assumption does not hold true for those now having to respond to Building for Life – such as affordable housing providers' development and regeneration staff. This guidance was therefore commissioned to address that different readership.

The guidance has been developed from a number of existing good-practice sources (see the bibliography for more details), but specifically draws upon existing CABE advice and the additional criteria used by Tribal's Urban Studio Building for Life review of providers' schemes being undertaken at the time of writing. This is in the interests of consistency both now and in the future.

The guide has benefited from extensive consultation with providers, with two rounds of seminars. There were four full-day consultative seminars held in April 2008 in Birmingham and London. These were specifically to provide feedback on the first draft of the guide. Helpful comments were also received from members of the London Housing Federation Technical Group. Finally, five regional seminars were held (Leicester, Croydon, Exeter, Leeds and London), attended by provider and Housing Corporation staff in June, which provided further comments on the draft guidance.

Balancing acts

Designing is intrinsically a balancing act, which this guide reflects. There is the tension between guidance that is sufficiently explanatory and the need for brevity. Plus, there is the introduction of new terms and – for some readers – concepts, without alienating the reader. The guide seeks to strike an appropriate balance on all these issues. Some of the issues in the balancing act of designing a scheme are highlighted in the following paragraphs.

For the great majority of schemes, there will be many possible design solutions. Good design is about thinking carefully to identify solutions that are better than the others. How does Building for Life help this?

It helps by highlighting that there are areas where experience has shown that some solutions generally work better than others, in many circumstances, and encourages the use of such good practice that has been developed.

Design inevitably involves tensions between all the different desired outcomes – privacy versus

overlooking of public places, quick direct routes versus preferred building size and arrangement, and of course the vexed question of parking. The multiplicity of issues that crash together when designing a scheme means that a detailed prescriptive set of solutions will not work well in very many cases. However, that doesn't mean that some generalisations cannot be made. Designers need to consider the applicability of each instance of good practice in the light of the complex inter-relationships between the scheme's many design issues, and propose designs accordingly – after careful consideration.

The expectations set out in this guide, therefore, are not rules. The only rule is that, regardless of whether schemes are developed in a hurry or not, design decisions should be based on thoughtful informed analysis, not on unthinking and/or ill-informed proposals.

Not a checklist

These expectations should not be seen as a simple checklist – it might be possible to tick very many boxes, yet still produce a very unsatisfactory scheme. As Building for Life assesses the scheme as completed, this may be dangerous.

This is difficult for providers, who understandably want as much clarity as possible on grant-compliance issues. This guide has been produced to provide more clarity over the Building for Life requirements, to assist in that endeavour.

However, providers should guard against a checklist approach to Building for Life – it is not ticking boxes that it important in this area, but the quality of the thinking behind the designs that will ensure that providers' schemes are of good quality.

Scheme size

In this guide a small scheme is up to approximately 20 dwellings, and a large scheme is over approximately 20 dwellings. This assumes that it is exclusively housing. A mixed-use scheme may be considered 'large' even though it has less than 20 dwellings.

A 'scheme' is a development or part of a development that has been separately designed (in terms of amount, layout, scale, landscaping and appearance). For some S106 schemes that might be the provider's part of the site, but where the provider's dwellings are pepper-potted, the 'scheme' will be the entire development.

Inter-relationships and readability

There are many inter-relationships between the questions. Thus looking at one specific issue may address more than one Building for Life question.

But this also means we either ask the reader to switch back and forth between sections, or repeat many sections, sometimes several times. We have chosen the former option.

How to use this guide

Having cautioned against treating the expectations in this guide as part of a checklist, how should the provider use it?

Firstly, it is an introduction to many aspects of designing for the built environment. It should be a helpful aid to many provider staff who are unfamiliar with what their design team actually do, and the issues with which they wrestle. Only a few such staff might have the opportunity to read the guide at one sitting, but it is recommended that staff are encouraged to have read it over within a reasonably short time – perhaps six months – preferably in the course of daily work, when reviewing proposed designs.

Secondly, the expectations should be used as indications (not prescriptive checklists) of how the designs might respond positively to the Building for Life questions. This will help both the provider and the design team.

Providers should not simply send the list of expectations to the design team with an instruction to comply. This would betray a misunderstanding of the fundamental requirement of Building for Life – that a thoughtful client-led approach is taken, not one of the client abdicating responsibility and unthinkingly and uncritically building whatever the designer proposes. Success, in terms of both design and compliance, is more likely if the provider ensures that as much careful thought as possible is applied to the design process.

Design and Access Statements

What are Design and Access Statements?

Introduced in 2006, they are a new and important addition to the information that applicants must provide when seeking a planning permission.

Communities and Local Government (CLG) Circular 01/06, Guidance on Changes to the Development Control System, states:

60. A Design and Access Statement is a short report accompanying and supporting a planning application to illustrate the process that has led to the development proposal, and to explain and justify the proposal in a structured way.
61. Design and Access Statements… provide an opportunity for developers and designers to demonstrate their commitment to achieving good design and ensuring accessibility in the work they undertake, and allow them to show how they are meeting, or will meet the various obligations placed on them by legislation and policy.
62. The level of detail required in a Design and Access Statement will depend on the scale and complexity of the application, and the length of the statement will vary accordingly. Statements must be proportionate to the complexity of the application, but need not be long.
63. Design and Access Statements help to ensure development proposals are based on a thoughtful design process and a sustainable approach to access; they allow the applicant to explain and justify their proposals; and they help all those assessing the application to understand the design and access rationale that underpins them. Statements should improve the quality of proposals.
64. Development proposals that are not based on a good understanding of local physical, economic and social context are often unsympathetic and poorly designed, and can lead to the exclusion of particular communities. A major part of a Design and Access Statement is the explanation of how local context has influenced the design.
65. For local planning authorities, Design and Access Statements will enable them to better understand the analysis which has underpinned the design and how it has led to the development of the scheme. This will help negotiations and decision making and lead to an improvement in the quality, sustainability and inclusiveness of the development.

What do Design and Access Statements contain?

CLG Circular 01/06 states:

> 80. The Design and Access Statement should cover both the design principles and concepts that have been applied to the proposed development and how issues relating to access to the development have been dealt with. Statements should evolve throughout the design and development process.
> 81. A Design and Access Statement should explain the design principles and concepts that have been applied to particular aspects of the proposal – these are the amount, layout, scale, landscaping and appearance of the development.

In short, Design and Access Statements:

- are a new and obligatory part of the process of obtaining planning permission;
- demand that the applicant undertakes an evaluation of the local neighbourhood with which the scheme is located;
- require the applicant to be able to demonstrate how their designs have been developed in the light of the local planning and other polices, and the characteristics of the local neighbourhood;
- are an opportunity for the applicant to explain to the planning authority why they should approve the application.

CABE has published advice on this issue: Design and Access Statements: How to Write, Read and Use Them (2006).

Good-quality Design and Access Statements will be of great help to providers in obtaining planning permission. In turn, a Design and Access Statement can only be as good as the design process that the provider operates; a well-managed process will result in both good designs and a high-quality Design and Access Statement.

The following section therefore provides some brief advice of how to ensure that the design process is well managed.

If the design process is well managed in order to produce good-quality designs that are explained in a robust Design and Access Statement, the designs will make a positive contribution to many of the Building for Life questions. Achieving the minimum number of Building for Life questions, as well as a strong Design and Access Statement, is likely to be an automatic side effect of a well-managed design process. Indeed, a good Design and Access Statement is likely to contain much of the evidence needed for many Building for Life questions.

Managing the design process

A good design process involves a few simple, common sense steps:

- the client knowing what they want from the project, ie the project objectives. (This is already a requirement for providers under the Construction Commitments 2012: "A detailed brief … (and a) definition of what is meant by success will be developed by the client before the design stage for all projects…");
- the client communicating this to the design team "…and this will be shared at the outset with all those involved", according to the Construction Commitments 2012;
- the client/design team understanding the policy context within which the scheme is being developed (planning, building control, other policies), the built context (the setting in which the scheme is located) and the site conditions and constraints. In other words, that we have done our homework before starting to produce designs;
- the design team thinking carefully about the various design solutions that are possible, in the light of the knowledge gained by doing the homework referred to above;
- the client is offered a range of design solutions that meet its objectives; and
- the best design solution is chosen and developed.

Obviously, it is easier to manage the design process well when there is little time pressure, for example. However, that is a luxury afforded to very few property developers in any sectors in real life – and yet there are noticeable differences between organisations in how well they fare with their design process in real life. A significant element of success, therefore, comes from the attitude and approach of the client.

A more effectively managed design process doesn't guarantee success – it just reduces the chances of failure, delay or unforeseen costs. These are valuable benefits.

For more detail about a good-practice design process, see Part B of the Guide to Standards and Quality in Development (National Housing Federation, 2008).

A well-managed design process involves the client requesting information from the design team that allows it to see the justification for the proposed designs. The next section considers this issue.

Example documentation

The Appendix on page 80 of this guide contains advice on the documents that a client would typically need when considering the suitability of design proposals. It also describes the purpose of each document. This is included in the guide to assist providers who have less experience of these good-practice processes and documents.

These documents will be very helpful to Building for Life assessors, as they would form a significant part of the information that the assessor will need when scoring the scheme. If the information isn't available in some form or another there is a risk that the question will be marked down.

Illustrations - A word of caution

The illustrations and diagrams used in this guide illustrate specific points about urban design. They are relevant to these learning points only and should not be seen as good-practice examples of other issues. The styles shown are, of course, of their time and location and so should not be taken as models to be followed in all places at all times.

Part I
Environment and community

Question 1

Does the development provide (or is close to) community facilities, such as a school, parks, play areas, shops, pubs or cafés?

Guidance

Tip

"Successful communities depend on easy access to the rest of the neighbourhood, town and city and local facilities which are close to home. The homes provided cannot be just a housing estate, there must be shops, schools, health facilities and other amenities within easy reach for all residents if the area is to thrive. Local facilities help to build a community and discourage car use."

Urban Design Compendium

The Housing Quality Indicators (HQIs) give a good guide to the evidence required to meet this criterion, and the expectations have been drawn from the Location Indicator in HQIv4.

Tip

A quick way to find out what is close to the site is to consult: www.upmystreet.com

Summary of expectations

Residents have easy pedestrian access to a range of facilities:

- a healthcare facility or GP practice fairly near (between 500 m and 1 km);
- a public house, a place of worship, community hall or centre, restaurant or cafe within 1 km;
- local retail outlets – such as food store or newsagent – fairly near (500 m to 1 km);
- a post office facility fairly near (between 500 m and 1 km);
- a cashpoint/bank very near (within 500 m);
- a major commercial centre or 'high street' within 2 km;
- a public pre-school/nursery fairly near (between 500 m and 1 km);
- a primary school (not fee-paying) fairly near (between 500 m and 1 km);
- a secondary school (not fee-paying) more than 1 km but within 2 km;
- play facilities for 5-12 year olds fairly near (between 500 m and 1 km);
- play facilities for over 12s fairly near (between 500 m and 1 km); and
- a park/public, open space or a leisure/sports facility (eg pool or gym or playing fields) within 1 km.

Question 2

Is there an accommodation mix that reflects the needs and aspirations of the local community?

Guidance

The accommodation mix proposed should reflect the needs of the local community.

Mix and balance

Understanding the needs and aspirations of the community requires community consultation and local housing market and demographic research, as well as direction from the local authority. The scheme mix should reflect the results of this research and consultation, with some flexibility possible should these change over time. This is particularly important on large schemes where the build programme may extend well into the future.

As well as mixing tenure types, a successful community will need a balance of different housing types and sizes across larger schemes. There are tensions here: concentrating family houses together can mean that child density is not spread across the development. However, the design should consider how the needs of different groups can be accommodated, for example young children, young people, older residents etc. There should be adequate privacy between homes and compatibility of lifestyles.

Summary of expectations

- The accommodation mix proposed should reflect the needs of the local community (eg by reference to the local Strategic Housing Market Assessment);
- There should be a balance of different housing types and sizes across larger schemes; and
- There should be adequate privacy between homes and compatibility of lifestyles.

Question 3

Is there a tenure mix that reflects the needs of the local community?

Guidance

Housing need

The Strategic Housing Market Assessment will inform the local authority of the priority housing need groups in their area. It should also provide an indication of how housing need may change over the first decade or two of the development. The tenure mix proposed should reflect the needs of the local community.

The local authority and the provider should consider how the tenure mix may change over time and if that requires any amendment to, or future flexibility in, the design.

Successful mixed tenure is visually seamless

The relative proportions of the different tenure types does not seem to be a critical factor in the success or otherwise of neighbourhoods. Research suggests that the affordable housing should not be stigmatised in any way if the project is to succeed. Dispersing the affordable housing across the scheme will support this – rather than putting it all in one location.

Large developments should, therefore, plan to build and manage an integrated mix of tenures/affordability and dwelling types to promote social diversity and mimic many successful, long-established residential areas.

Early design decisions can adversely affect affordable housing when it is delivered as part of a mixed tenure scheme. The affordable homes may be located on the least desirable part of the site, typically in S106 schemes. A brick wall is sometimes built to separate the market sale homes from the affordable homes – the high wall serving no other use than this separation.

Equally, cash flow should not drive the distribution of dwelling types. For example, building homes for sale in the early phases to assist cash flow means that the affordable homes will follow later and therefore be concentrated in a phase or two and not distributed across the scheme. This should be considered both when designing and programming the project (for those schemes where the provider is in control of, or can influence, the design and planning processes).

To enhance long-term sustainability, the tenures should not only be well-distributed amongst each other, but the development should be 'tenure/affordability blind', ie the different tenure types are not apparent to a visitor from the design, quality or service standards of the streetscape and open areas. For example, open space and other amenities should be located to enable access for all, allowing children's play and social interaction.

High-quality open space and public realm on a mixed tenure development are important contributors to its success. Treating the external appearance and common areas equally, regardless of tenure type, is important in avoiding identification, and maintaining 'blindness'.

This blindness can be maintained over time if the different parts of the scheme are managed to the same standards. There can be tension here between this objective, and the desire of providers to keep service charges to a minimum (in the interests of low-income households).

The provider should, therefore, have a management plan for the development that ensures appropriate housing services are provided to all regardless of tenure and that the tenure balance is maintained in future. The management plan should specifically address how tenure/affordability blindness is to be maintained over the long term, whilst keeping service charges as low as possible to low-income households.

Summary of expectations

- The tenure mix proposed should reflect the needs of the local community (eg by reference to the local authority Strategic Housing Market Assessment); and
- There should be a management plan for the development that ensures appropriate housing services are provided to all regardless of tenure and that the tenure balance is maintained in future.

Question 4

Does the development have easy access to public transport?

Guidance

Connections

Issues about connecting the scheme to the local neighbourhood are addressed in more detail in Questions 11-15.

Public transport – Availability

Building homes that have good access to public transport meets a number of aims, including:

- offering residents choice in their mode of transport;
- reduced pollution and impact on climate change;
- improved health and well being through more walking;
- more vitality on streets through increased pedestrian activity; and
- helping to reduce car use and, therefore, the need for parking provision.

There is clearly a link between the density of the scheme proposed and the financial viability and therefore sustainability of public transport provision. Densities of at least 40 dwellings/80 people per hectare within a 400 m radius of bus stops helps to make bus routes more viable.

Higher densities may be provided close to the bus stops – this would be consistent with government planning policy.

On larger schemes it may be possible to influence transport provision and develop a new bus service for the new homes. This possibility needs to be considered early in the design process in collaboration with the transport provider. Residential streets can accommodate bus routes if planned for at the design stage. (See Question 11 for guidance on this issue.)

Tip

Connections

"Bus use depends on:

- routes which follow the principal roads or streets through an area;
- stops located where activity is concentrated, near shops or a road junction;
- clear walking routes to the stops, including road crossings."

Better Places to Live by Design

Many schemes funded by the Housing Corporation will not be of a size to warrant this consideration, but how well-connected the scheme is to public transport should always be considered at the outset.

Public transport – Useability

Pedestrian routes to public transport should feel safe and be attractive to encourage their use at all times of the day. They should be clear and direct and as short as possible, with access to a bus stop within a five to ten-minute walk (500 m – 1 km).

The bus route should be reasonably simple and direct, not one that loops and twists through an area.

Public transport stops should be located in areas where there is other activity, such as shops or other amenities. Placing the stop near a junction allows it to be accessed from more than one route and so serve a wider catchment.

The stops should be easily accessible on foot and positioned conveniently. There should be sufficient footway width to accommodate people waiting for the bus and pedestrians walking past. Routes to bus stops should be direct, well lit, safe, attractive and accessible by disabled people.

The measures should support walking, cycling and public transport use, and parking restraint.

Summary of expectations

- The scheme should have access to a bus, tram or train stop within a five to ten-minute walk (500 m to 1 km);
- The layout should provide routes to local transport stops that are clear and direct and as short as possible;
- Routes to transport stops should be direct, well lit, safe and attractive;
- Routes to transport stops should be accessible by disabled people;
- When located within the scheme, public transport stops should be created in areas where there is other activity such as shops or other amenities; and
- Where provided as part of the scheme, transport stops should have sufficient footway width to accommodate people waiting for the bus and pedestrians walking past.

Question 5

Does the scheme include any features that reduce its environmental impact?

Expectation

This question can be met by providing evidence that the scheme will achieve the Housing Corporation's environmental sustainability requirements applicable to the scheme. This is at least Level 3 of the Code for Sustainable Homes for schemes funded in 2008-11.

Part II
Character

Question 6

Is the design specific to the scheme?

Guidance

Design management process

This question is primarily about the extent to which the provider's design team has considered the design opportunities and constraints of the site, when formulating responses to the client's requirements. In other words, that the design has been the product of careful thought about the specific development in question, rather than a formulaic response.

This, in turn, means that the provider should have clearly identified its requirements, and have briefed the design team accordingly. Also, the site context will have to have been evaluated, as will the planning and building control environment within which the scheme is to be progressed.

This boils down to how well the provider, as client, manages the design process. This question, therefore, addresses this issue, by expecting that providers should follow the principles of good design management process, an example of which is set out in Part B of the National Housing Federation's Guide to Standards and Quality in New Development (2008).

In particular, the provider should have considered design options, including alternative layouts and/or dwelling types that meet the initial brief before selecting the preferred design for the scheme to ensure that it has identified the best design solution for the scheme, and site opportunities are utilised.

Meeting this question's expectations will enhance the chances of meeting other questions' expectations. Of course, it does not guarantee it, as it is possible to implement a good process but still produce a poor scheme. But it's less likely.

Standard house types/systems/components

This question is not antipathetic to standard house types, systems (such as standard bathroom layouts) or components. Indeed, Question 19 encourages thoughtful use of standardised elements etc. However, this question would not be satisfied by designs that simply using pre-existing site layouts from other projects or only standard dwelling elevations. This would result in "anywhere housing" – see Question 17.

Summary of expectations

- The provider should have followed the principles of good design management process, an example of which is set out in Part B of the National Housing Federation's Guide to Standards and Quality in New Development (2008); and
- The provider should have considered design options, including alternative layouts and/or dwelling types that meet the initial brief before selecting the preferred design for the scheme.

Question 7

Does the scheme exploit existing buildings, landscape and topography?

Guidance

This question is linked to Question 8 – creating or maintaining a sense of identity. Identity can be created from scratch, although this usually means that the design has to make quite a 'strong' statement. This can result in as many people disliking it as those who find it appealing.

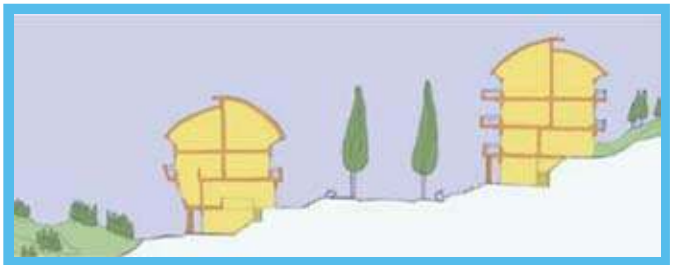
An equally effective approach to generating a feeling of identity is for the design to use, reflect or make reference to some existing characteristic or characteristics of the surrounding area. This signals that the scheme is 'part of' the wider neighbourhood's identity.

A relatively easy way to achieve this is for the scheme to incorporate any existing buildings, landscape or topography that would contribute positively towards that sense of identity and character. Not all buildings, soft/hard landscaping or existing topography may be suitable. They themselves may be out of character with the surrounding area. However, where they would be of assistance, the client and designer should consider retaining them and incorporating them into the scheme

Topography

Terminology
The surface features of the site: its slopes, dips and bumps.

The topography of the scheme may offer significant opportunities or difficulties for the design team. It may help or hinder solar orientation. It certainly has to be well understood early in the design process, so that the designs can maximise the opportunities and deal with the problems the topography throws up.



The Urban Design compendium says:

"Working with the grain of the landscape… can have economic benefits as well as reinforcing the sense of place. Wherever possible, align building footprints, streets, sewers and other watercourses to follow slope contours. This allows building profiles to grow out of the ground, minimises cut and fill and enables natural gravity-flow drainage to be utilised."

The scheme should therefore make good use of the topography and natural elements as well as other benefits such as views on the site to improve its design form.

Using existing soft landscaping

It is also worth noting that new development in suburban or rural settings is often disliked by neighbours because it will inevitably appear very 'raw' for many years, until the soft landscaping (in particular) has grown and matured. Therefore, the retention of mature trees, bushes, weathered walls etc can provide a new scheme with a fast track to a more mature appearance, which is likely to be appreciated by neighbours.

Large (mature) trees have an enormously beneficial impact on a scheme. They absorb pollution, provide shade to offset the heating generated by built-up areas, provide habitat and are generally perceived to provide significant visual appeal, whether the scheme design is urban and contemporary, suburban and 'traditional' or rural.

The Tree Council provides a useful leaflet on tree planting, and on how to value trees: http://www.treecouncil.org.uk

The scheme should, therefore, make good use of landscape features (eg mature trees, habitats) on the existing site to provide a sense of identity and character to the scheme.

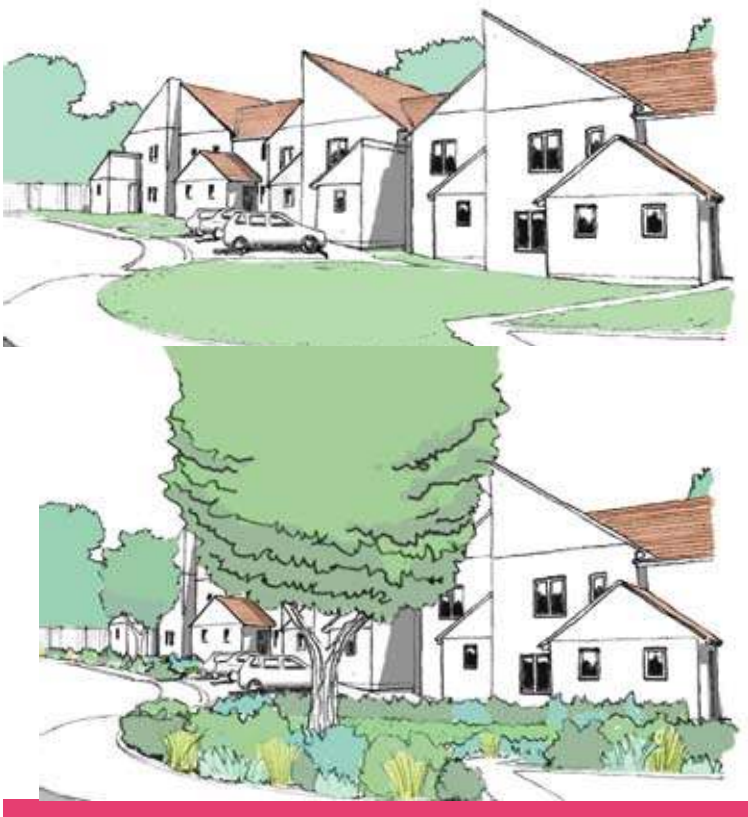


Fig 1: Two illustrations showing how a scheme can appear much more attractive with more mature soft landscaping (HATC / Jan Randall).

Fig 2: A mature tree has been retained in this new development (CABE).

Fig 3: The view to the distance has not been obstructed by the gable end beyond the cars (Dominic Church).

Fig 4: The first image shows how a view can be retained (HATC Jan Randall).

Figure 4 shows how a view can be retained, which will help orientation and sense of connection to the locality. Has it come at the cost of losing two houses? Or were they located in another part of the site where they didn't obstruct views? It's a matter of thinking the issues through. Certainly being able to retain the view is likely to go down well with the planners.

Summary of expectations

- The design should make good use of the topography and natural elements on the site and other benefits, such as views; and
- The design should also make good use of existing buildings or other features (eg mature trees, habitats) on the existing site that will help to provide a sense of identity and character to the scheme.

Question 8

Does the scheme feel like a place with a distinctive character?

Guidance

The Design and Access Statement

As noted in the introduction, the procedure for seeking permission was updated in 2006, and a new requirement was introduced for Design and Access Statements. These are the applicant's opportunity to highlight how the proposed designs have been developed, and how they reflect the local planning policies. Those policies will expect the designs to have been prepared in the light of a good understanding of the locality within which the scheme is set, and to have been carefully thought through. A strong process, leading to a strong Design and Access Statement, will simultaneously be helpful in obtaining planning permission and address the Building for Life questions.

The Design and Access Statement that accompanies the planning application should explain how the assessment of the site and its context has determined the proposed design.

A sense of place

This question is about avoiding situations where people say:

- "This could be anywhere;" or
- "Every street looks exactly the same – there's no way of knowing where we are."

Different parts of the country have different types of settlement and building styles, particularly in housing. These different 'local vernaculars' stem from the use of different local materials and styles.

Much local character has been diluted over time. However, there is usually enough locally distinctive character in a neighbourhood or street for a new scheme to be able to reflect or reinforce it.

To do so, however, means that the design process should begin by looking beyond the boundaries of the scheme. The scheme designer should therefore undertake an analysis of the area surrounding the site. This analysis is the basis from which a design can be developed which responds specifically to the location. It should include:

- physical and social geography of the area and local character;
- connections to the surrounding neighbourhood;
- topography and natural features of the site;
- local climate;
- historic routes and patterns of development; and
- local building heights and shapes.

For more detail on this analysis, see the National Housing Federation's Design Management Process (Part B of the Guide to Standards and Quality in Development, 2008).

Terminology
The designer's term for this exercise is a 'context analysis'.

A question of scale

This question applies, as expressed, for larger schemes which comprise an ensemble of buildings that define a range of public or shared spaces that a visitor or passer-by can walk through and experience. Larger schemes (20 homes or more) should be designed so that residents and neighbours perceive that it has its own identity and a distinctive character.

For smaller schemes which comprise only one or very few buildings, and only minimal spaces that can be walked through, the question might be read, "Does the scheme feel like a place that reinforces or improves local character?" This applies to even the smallest schemes. In these cases, the 'distinctiveness' referred to in the question might be more dependent on the character, dimensions, proportions and materials used for the building(s) itself. This Building for Life question is then very closely related to HQI questions 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3[1].

Distinctive character or reinforcing local character

The scheme proposals should be an individual, tailored response to the site and its surroundings (its context). The designs should:

- meet the requirements of the provider's brief; and
- do so in an appropriate way, ie:
  - respond positively to the local context in terms of layout, scale, landscaping (hard and soft), architectural detailing and materials used;
  - integrate into the wider neighbourhood through the existing network of streets and roads;
  - make the most of any existing natural features, landmarks and views; and
  - include variety in the new development.

These issues are each addressed in the following sections.

[1]2.1 Does the site scale and concept fit well with the surrounding area?; 2.2 Are the buildings in context with local buildings, street patterns (form, mass, detail and materials)? (When the local environment is of poor visual quality enter n/a for questions 2.1, 2.2); 2.3 Do the buildings enhance the local environment?

Responding to the local context

Is this just copying?

Responding to, or 'taking account of' the context does not simply mean copying the dominant forms and styles in the neighbouring area. Nor does it necessarily mean avoiding contemporary design. It may mean choosing a number of successful and distinctive elements from the neighbourhood to repeat on the development, or reflecting the local context very closely.

It may be that the neighbouring area and local context is of poor quality. It might then be inappropriate to 'fit in' to the neighbourhood, and it may be better to innovate and be different. If so, the designs should be based on a thorough understanding of the context within which the scheme is set, so that the designs enhance the neighbourhood, and do not simply jar with it.

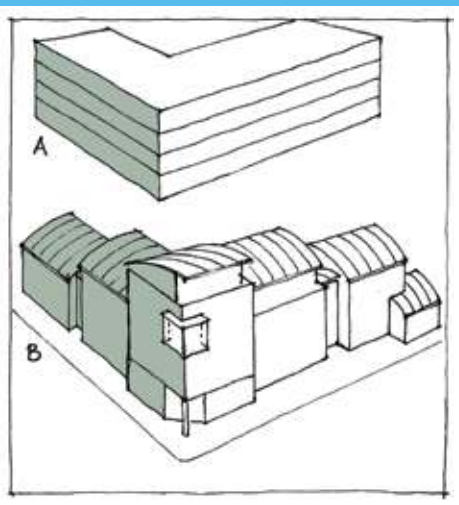
Fig 5: The new scheme (highlighted) was designed to be sympathetic to the adjoining Georgian buildings (HATC / Jan Randall).

Fig 6: An example of not responding to the local context, all small two-storey Victorian terraces. The new development is for a five-storey block (HATC).

Fig 7: An existing scheme (HATC/Jan Randall).

Fig 8: A new development that was designed to reflect several of the charateristics of the terrace above (HATC/Jan Randall).

Scale is not only defined by height and bulk, but by the size and proportions of the openings in an elevation and the size of the units (brick or precast panel) that comprise the elevation, in relation to the person.



Block A - a uniform volume of development, with no differentiation of height or depth. Its horizontal emphasis is unlikely to be sympathetic to an established street frontage.

Block B - whilst a similar volume to A, the building has been articulated into a series of constituent parts, both in width and height, culminating in the corner, which is a pivotal point in an established street scene. Profiled roof shapes contribute to succesful massing (Hertfordshire County Council).

Tip

The Urban Design Compendium sets out how to be a 'good neighbour' and develop a scheme which sits well with the existing buildings around it:

"Respect for context requires adhering to:

- continuity of building line;
- a street's vertical and horizontal 'rhythms';
- the local pattern of streets, blocks and building types;
- adjacent building heights, roof and cornice lines; and
- local building materials."

Terminology

A building line is created when buildings facing a road are set back the same distance.

Terminology

'Rhythm' – some regularity of appearance (the building widths, the proportion and scale of windows and doors). A rather fine distinction, here, between welcome regularity and tedious repetition. It is to do with the detailing of the front elevations.

Terminology

The designer's term for this pattern of streets, blocks and buildings is the local 'morphology'.

Fig 9: Low walls or hedges lose the sense of continuity of the building line (Essex County Council).

Fig 10: Tall railings maintain the 'line', providing a sense of enclosure, even when the building is set back (Essex County Council).

Fig 11: Eaves detailing that offers subtle variety in two adjacent Victorian streets (Jim McMillan).

Building size and position

The designer should also consider the proportions and scale of the buildings proposed and how they relate to each other and the neighbourhood.

How the scheme relates to the local built form is another factor to consider in relating the design to the site's context. The 'built form' is the size, shape and layout of the surrounding buildings and the network of roads, streets and spaces.

The height and width of the buildings are also important. What are the heights and widths of surrounding buildings, how are they arranged and how does the proposed design fit with them?

A building line which is used along the length of the street – by existing and new buildings – gives continuity and helps existing and new development integrate.

Other ways of responding positively to the local context are:

- using local traditions in terms of building types, techniques or materials;
- introducing variety into the design (see below, in this section); and
- choosing materials and finishes that work well in context and look good in sun and shadow, rain and sun.

Standard house types

Many standard house types have been developed that have been carefully designed so that they

offer good quality layouts and efficiencies in construction. In addition, the external appearance of standard house types can often be varied. This allows them to respond positively to the local neighbourhood in terms of their shape, roofline and shape, elevational detailing and the materials used for the external envelope.

Standard house types that do not vary their external appearance to reflect their locality ('anywhere housing') would have difficulty in meeting the expectations of this question.

Integrating into the neighbourhood

This issue is covered under Question 9 – Does the scheme integrate with existing roads, paths and surrounding development? Please refer to that section for more details on this issue.

Use existing features

This issue is covered under Question 5 – Does the scheme exploit existing buildings, landscape or topography? Please refer to that section for more details on this issue.

Variety

Variety in itself is not necessarily a virtue, but on larger schemes it can be helpful to consider using a range of architects to achieve variety and sustain interest across the development, but requiring them to work within the discipline of a design code for the scheme.

The scheme should provide suitable variety in design, in schemes that are large enough to warrant it.

Terminology

Design code

"Design codes are a distinct form of detailed design guidance. A design code is a set of written and graphic rules that establish with precision the two- and three-dimensional design elements of a particular development or area – and how these relate to one another without establishing the overall outcome…

"Design codes set out design principles aimed at delivering better quality places, for example the requirements for streets, blocks, massing and so forth… Codes are focused around those design characteristics that are important to achieve, and they establish and firmly fix the 'must have' design elements."
(Preparing Design Codes – A Practice Manual CLG 2006)

Where the design includes large blocks it may be worth dividing them into a series of smaller blocks, to allow a degree of architectural variety. These 'blocks' do not need to be separate perimeter blocks with roads or footpaths between them. This is more about breaking up what might otherwise be a monotonous street appearance by providing variety.

Variety can be achieved by significantly different designs, or designs that are subtly different – see illustrations.

Summary of expectations

- The Design and Access Statement that accompanies the planning application should explain how the assessment of the site and its context has determined the proposed design;
- The scheme designer should undertake an analysis of the area surrounding the site;
- A larger scheme (20 homes or more) should be designed so that residents and neighbours perceive that it has its own identity and a distinctive character. Smaller schemes should reinforce or improve the local character.
- The designs should:
    - meet the requirements of the provider's brief; and
    - do so in an appropriate way, ie:
    - respond positively to the local context in terms of layout, scale, landscaping (hard and soft), architectural detailing and materials used;
    - integrate into the wider neighbourhood through the existing network of streets and roads;
    - make the most of any existing natural features, landmarks and views; and
    - include variety in the new development;
- The scheme should provide suitable variety in design, in schemes that are large enough to warrant it.

Question 9

Do the buildings and layout make it easy to find your way around?

Guidance

This question is about legibility.

The scheme should provide clues that allow us to 'read' the layout easily? For example, is it fairly clear where the centre of the scheme is located? If we see a taller/bigger/more formal-looking building over there we are likely to conclude that it's a local centre.

Clearly, this question is of greater importance, the greater the scale of the development. The legibility issues related to the development of a single block of flats will be much less than those associated with a mixed use development including over a thousand dwellings.

Terminology
Architectural legibility is the degree to which the features of the environment help or hinder people to create an effective mental 'map' of an area or building. In other words, does the scheme provide clues that allow us to 'read' the layout easily?

Making a scheme legible

Legibility comes from a variety of sources:

- The roads, streets and paths in the scheme should be well connected to those in the surrounding areas;
- The main routes (whether for vehicles, pedestrians or cyclists) between the key spaces and places within the scheme should be clear, direct and unambiguous;
- Large residential areas should have a variation in character between different parts;
- Public (as opposed to shared/communal) open spaces should be treated as foci on to which dwellings front, rather than being tucked away behind the backs of houses;
- Existing and new landmarks (eg vistas, trees, buildings etc) or other ways of orienting oneself should be used to provide orientation. The landmarks could be distinctive buildings, spaces, or landscape features (plants, sculptures, water features, views etc) that are located at points in the network where they can aid orientation;
- Design elements should be provided that help in navigating around the site (providing big visual clues such as scale, massing and formality of buildings and public spaces through to smaller visual clues such as appropriate signage); and
- All entrances to buildings and addresses should be easily identifiable from the street.

Summary of expectations

- The roads, streets and paths in the scheme should be well connected to those in the surrounding areas;
- The main routes (whether for vehicles, pedestrians or cyclists) between the key spaces and places within the scheme should be clear, direct and unambiguous;
- Large residential areas should have a variation in character between different parts;
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- All entrances to buildings and addresses should be easily identifiable from the street.

Question 10

Are streets defined by a well-structured building layout?

Guidance

A well-structured building layout is one that achieves a number of outcomes:

- it provides a sense of enclosure;
- it clearly defines whether space is public, private or shared/communal;
- the backs and fronts of buildings are readily distinguishable;
- it helps residents and visitors feel secure by offering 'active frontages' (see below); and
- it allows for variety in design, in schemes that are large enough to warrant it.

These points are developed below.

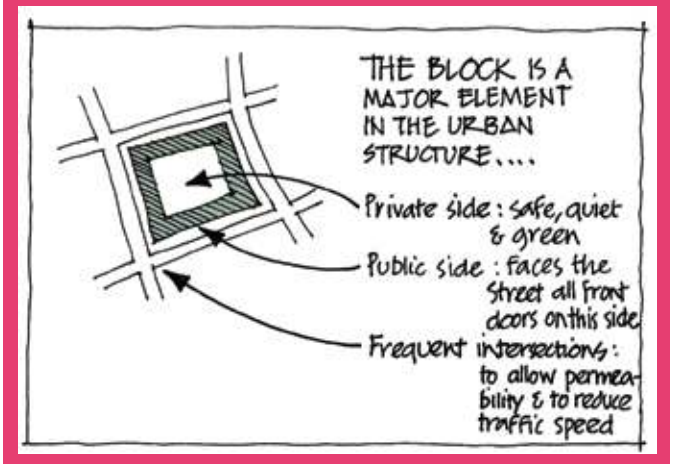
It is worth highlighting in this section, however, the stages that should be followed in order to reach the building layout.

1. Analysing the scheme's local neighbourhood (the context analysis) allows the client and designer to understand the likely pattern of movement of residents and visitors to/ from the scheme and to agree what external connections the scheme should provide (see Question 6);

2. For larger schemes the external connections and desire lines within the scheme effectively break the overall site up into a series of blocks. The layout of buildings on each block will then be prepared in the light of decisions on parking arrangements, restricting public access to the 'interior' of blocks and other security issues;

Terminology

To an architect or masterplanner, a 'block' is NOT a big building, but an area of land divided from others by a road, river railway line or other boundary. The next question is how the buildings should be arranged on the block. A common arrangement is the 'perimeter block' where the buildings are set all around the edge, as illustrated below:



(Hertfordshire County Council).

3. The perimeter of each block will then be developed at varying levels of density, depending upon the required density of the overall scheme.

A question of scale

It is self-evident that this question applies to the proposed layout of large schemes, but what of small ones that do not have a layout as such?

Smaller schemes can meet these expectations by the way they help maintain or improve (and not detract from) the structure of the building layout in the immediate vicinity of the scheme. In other words, this question looks beyond the site boundary, as well as what is within the site boundary, just as many other questions do.

A sense of enclosure

The concept of buildings 'containing' the space and providing a sense of enclosure is a useful one. The buildings should enclose and frame the streets and open spaces.

Buildings should not be located in an isolated fashion, separated by car parks or access roads.

The spaces between buildings should be designed to create a good relationship between the massing of buildings and the distances between them. Spaces which are too narrow with buildings that are too tall can be badly lit and feel oppressive, whereas spaces which are too wide, with adjoining buildings which are too low, can feel unwelcoming and ill-defined.

Terminology

'Enclosure' means feeling that an area is well contained. As a rule of thumb, this may be achieved through two mechanisms:

- avoiding large gaps between the buildings that frame the space; and
- having the buildings at least one third as high as the space between them is wide (see Urban Design Compendium 5.1.3, which is repeated in the Manual for Streets).

Clearly defined public, private and shared/ communal spaces

Please refer to Question 15 for the definitions of these different spaces.

Also note that Question 16 has requirements regarding private, shared/communal and public space.

Buildings

It should be very obvious to visitors what is the front and what is the back of a home or block of flats.

Fronts and backs should not be mixed in a building frontage.

Fig 12: Where is the entrance to this ground-floor flat? It is through the dark opening on the right of the fence and gate? (HATC)

Building fronts should face onto streets, parks, squares and other public areas.

The design of building fronts should reflect the nature of the public spaces they address.

For the front and back of the building to be a meaningful distinction, access to the buildings should be through the front elevation, with no public access to the back from a public area.

The backs of buildings should face onto private or shared/communal gardens or courtyards. The design should clearly discourage uninvited intrusion into these areas.

Access to the back from shared/communal areas may be necessary (to allow bins to be placed to rear of properties, furniture and appliances to be moved into properties by a means other than the front door etc). Access to these areas should be controlled. This can be by 'hard' barriers – alley gates, car park barriers etc – and/or by 'soft' barriers – visual clues that one is moving from a public space to a more private space. These visual clues are referred to as 'thresholds' or 'gateways'.

Terminology

'Gateways' or 'thresholds' are a design effect that provides a clear, if subtle, message that a boundary is being crossed, such as moving from a public to a private area, or from the private area of the development to a shared/communal one.

Tip

Gateways are created by a number of means – a narrowed entrance to the site or place, a change of road surface, a gateway under or through a building, or a hard or soft landscape effect. They should be noticeable and proportionate to the scale of the space entered.

A gateway or a threshold can be:

- literal – an archway or upper floor of the building over-sailing an access road; and
- symbolic – a construction either between buildings or interface elements (walls, car ports, soft landscaping etc) which suggests 'entry' into a particular place.

Effective access control is of paramount importance to the long-term success of a development. This is considered in Question 15, but one of the main lessons is that all such areas (whether public, shared/communal or private) should be overlooked by as many homes as possible.

Fig 13: A road junction design that appears fully public (HATC/Jan Russell).

Fig 14: Through the design, there is an indication that the road is not open to the public (HATC/Jan Russell).

Fig 15: An even stronger indication that the road is not open to the public (HATC/Jan Russell).

Fig 16: The use of a shared porch in the design on the right makes clear that the shared path is not a public one (HATC/Jan Russell).

Active frontages

Designing 'active frontages' promotes overlooking and passive surveillance, as well as making the public realm livelier and more interesting.

Active frontage means having:

- frequent doors and windows in the frontage of buildings;
- a reasonably continuous building line;
- projecting bay windows, balconies and porches; and
- few or no blank walls.

Terminology
Active frontages are features of buildings that will result in people observing the public spaces (such as the street, play area etc). This is either because those areas are overlooked, and/or because the design encourages people into the public space. For example, street parking gets residents out of their front doors onto the street; rear courtyard parking reduces this activity, resulting in a less active frontage.

Fig 17: A road designed primarily to carry traffic. Not only is it a soulless place, but it's value to pedestrians as a safe walking route is also undermined by a lack of surveillance from nearby houses (Tribal Consulting).

For frontages to be active, there should be a good balance between opportunities to look out onto the street and adequate privacy for the rooms inside the home. Too little privacy results in residents keeping curtains or blinds closed, resulting in a blank frontage.

The active frontage needs to be continued as buildings turn corners, avoiding blank walls fronting on to the public realm wherever possible. Using square and shallow-plan dwellings can help with this, or building flats at the corners of the block.

Fig 18: Active frontages that become inactive as residents secure their privacy by use of blinds or curtains (Dominic Church).

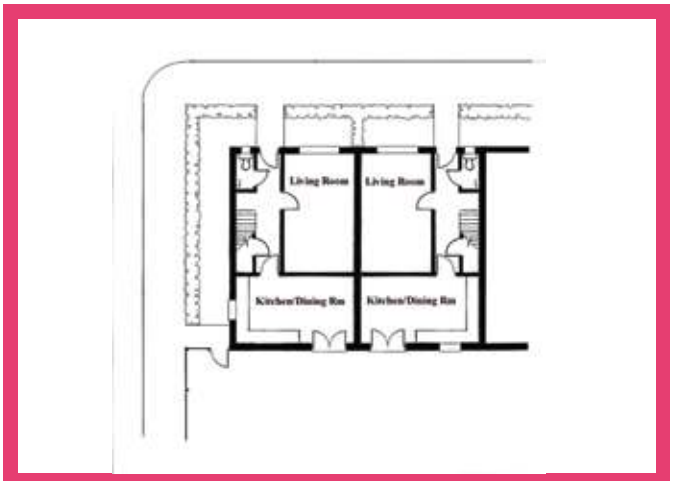


Fig 20: A small window has been inserted into the kitchen / diner to improve the activity of the frontage to the side road (HATC / Jan Randall).

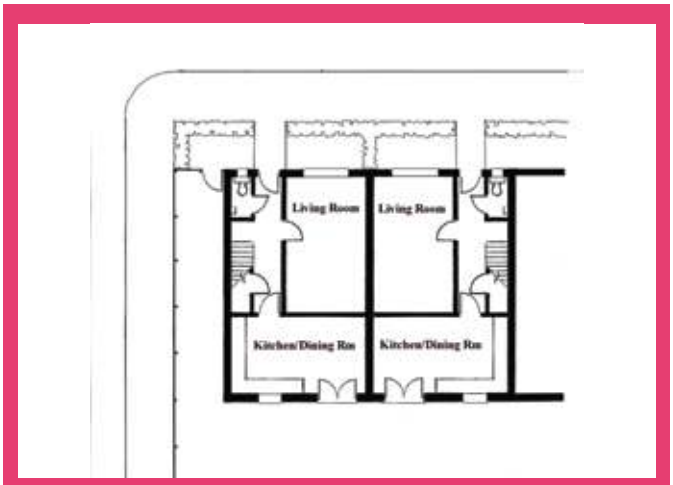


Fig 19: A common arrangement of terraces or semi-detached houses is to have a left-hand and right-hand version adjacent. This arrangement has been continued to the corner, resulting in a blank wall facing the side road (HATC / Jan Randall).

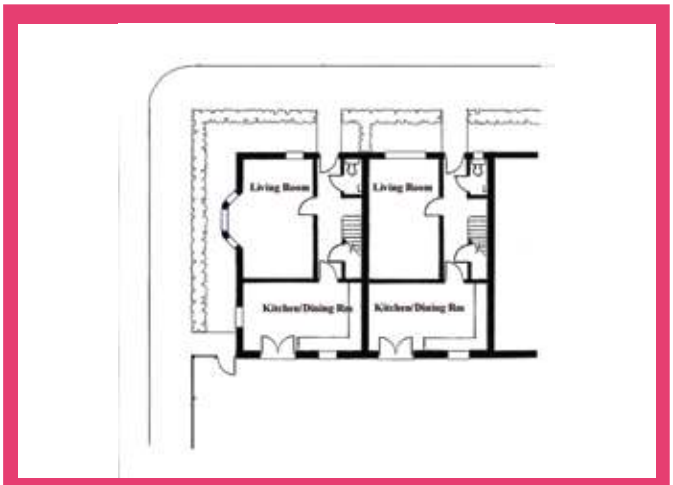


Fig 21: A more thoughtful approach has significantly improved the activity of the frontage by:

- 'handing' the property so that the living room is now double-aspect;
- inserting a living room window as well as the kitchen/diner window (it could be instead of it); and
- making the living room window a bay window, to increase the surveillance range (HATC / Jan Randall).

Fig 22: Little or no overlooking of the street adjacent to this house (Dominic Church).

Tip

The Urban Design Compendium includes guidelines for measuring active frontages (see UDC section 5.2.1, page 89).

The scheme should avoid having blank areas or facades facing onto the street or public space.

Use bay or other projecting windows and carefully designed corner buildings to provide more opportunities for overlooking and passive surveillance.

- The buildings should enclose and frame clearly defined spaces which can easily be identified as streets, lanes, squares etc;
- Buildings should not be located in an isolated fashion, through separation by car parks or access roads;
- What is the front and what is the back of a dwelling or block of flats should be very obvious to visitors;
- Building fronts should face onto streets, parks, squares and other public areas;
- Fronts and backs should not be mixed in a building frontage;
- The design of building fronts should reflect the nature of the public spaces they address;
- The backs of buildings should face onto private or shared/communal gardens or courtyards. The design should make it very clear to the passer-by that uninvited intrusion into these areas is inappropriate;
- The scheme should avoid having blank areas or facades facing on to the street or public space; and
- The scheme should use bay or other projecting windows and carefully designed corner buildings to provide more opportunities for overlooking and passive surveillance throughout the day.

Summary of expectations

Part III
Streets

Question 11

Does the building layout take priority over the roads and car parking, so that the highways do not dominate?

Guidance

Tip
What is a street? The Manual for Streets says:

"For the purposes of this document, a street is defined as a highway that has important public realm functions beyond the movement of traffic. Most critically, streets should have a sense of place, which is mainly realised through local distinctiveness and sensitivity in design. They also provide direct access to the buildings and the spaces that line them. Most highways in built-up areas can therefore be considered as streets."

Do we design the building layout or the streets first?

Actually, what comes first is an understanding of how people will want to move within the scheme (for larger schemes) and to/from the scheme and the rest of the neighbourhood. The building layout can then be planned to accommodate the desire lines within the overall structure, but the decision on the size and nature of the resulting routes comes later.

At the outset of designing a scheme, clients and designers should consider how pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles need to move in and across the neighbourhood. This should take account of:

- the places people want to get to, such as local schools, shops, public transport stops etc;
- how local people are likely to want to use the space; and
- the different needs of people.

This analysis should consider any historic patterns of movement. Restoring all or part of these may be effective in linking the scheme back into the surrounding network.

Then, the design, layout and use of all public spaces, including streets, should be considered. The building layout is then designed to complement and reinforce the layout of public spaces.

Terminology
The directions in which people will want to walk, cycle or drive are called 'desire lines'.

Terminology
All this analysis of the places where people will generally want to go, and how they are likely to get there is called a 'Movement Assessment'. From it we can design a 'Movement Framework'.

"A clearly defined and coherent urban structure is characterised by a framework of inter-connected routes which defined 'blocks' of housing, open spaces and other uses…some of our most attractive and enduring residential environments have the simplest of structures and are often nothing more than a regular pattern of rectangular blocks. Their visual quality comes not from the two-dimensional layout, but in the mix of activities and for the quality of detailing of the buildings, the landscape and the interfaces between these elements."

Better Places to Live By Design

Successful developments are generally well connected to their neighbourhood and integrated into the existing network of roads, streets and footpaths. Connections are specifically addressed in Question 14, and that section should be read in conjunction with this section.

Designs should ensure:

- Enough access points into and, where appropriate, through the development, which provide clear views, easy orientation and direct routes; and
- That the scheme successfully connects scheme roads, streets or paths for vehicles, cycles and pedestrians with existing routes in the surrounding area while discouraging the formation of vehicle 'rat-runs' through the scheme.

Local consultation is an important part of this analysis – the larger the scheme the more important it is, of course. The detailed purpose and function of each route within the development and its connection to the wider neighbourhood can then be considered and planned. Buildings of appropriate size, shape, layout and proportion will help to create well-defined, attractive streets and spaces which are pleasant to use and enjoy.

Streets should be designed as public spaces not just roads

Streets are not just there to get people from A to B, they provide a social space that is very important. Streets need to work well for all people, regardless of age, ability or circumstance.

Street layout and design in residential areas is no longer just about engineering highways to cope with predicted volumes of traffic and the needs of drivers. Streets are about walking, meeting people, using wheelchairs, pushing buggies, cycling and driving; a balance between people and cars. This is government policy for both planning and highways teams (see also the following section: Manual for Streets).

In summary, streets should be designed as public places, not just roads.

The Manual for Streets

From 2007, the Manual for Streets replaced the Design Bulletin 32, issued in the 1970s. It represents a significant change of policy direction, towards designing primarily for pedestrians and cyclists, and placing vehicles' needs as a lower priority. It promotes a return to a more traditional street pattern, tighter corners and narrower roads etc, which will allow vehicles to pass, but at lower speeds.

The requirements of the Manual for Streets could usefully be highlighted, at an early stage in the design process, by providers in discussions with local authority planners and highways officers in support of people-friendly road and street design.

Parking

Where and how cars are parked influences the quality of a street and the experience of a place. Car parking should be considered during the initial design to make sure it works and to minimise its visual impact (see Question 12 for more detail).

The main changes in approach recommended by the Manual for Streets are:

- putting pedestrians first;
- a collaborative approach to the delivery of streets, rather than the rigid application of engineering standards;
- recognising the importance of the community function of streets as spaces for social interaction;
- promoting an inclusive environment that recognises the needs of people of all ages and abilities;
- reflecting pedestrian desire lines in networks and detailed designs;
- creating networks of streets that provide permeability and connectivity to main destinations and a choice of routes;
- moving away from standard road types based on traffic flows and/or the number of buildings served to streets that are designed as places which must serve a range of users;
- developing street character types according to their location;
- encouraging innovation with a flexible approach to street layouts and the use of locally distinctive, durable and maintainable materials and street furniture;
- designing to keep vehicle speeds at or below 20mph on residential streets; and
- using the minimum of highway design features necessary to make the streets work properly.

Summary of expectations

- At the outset of designing a scheme, clients and designers should consider how pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles need to move in and across the neighbourhood;
- The design, layout and use of all public spaces, including streets, should be considered. The building layout is then designed to complement and reinforce the layout of the public spaces;
- There should be enough access points into and, where appropriate, through the development, which provide clear views, easy orientation and direct routes;
- The scheme should successfully connect scheme roads, streets or paths for vehicles, cycles and pedestrians with existing routes in the surrounding area, while discouraging the formation of vehicle 'rat-runs' through the scheme; and
- Streets should be designed as public spaces, rather than just roads.

Question 12

Is car parking well integrated and situated so it supports the street scene?

Guidance

Parking is one of the most difficult challenges in housing design. It has a significant influence on the character of a development, its visual impact, the level of activity on the street, social interaction and safety as well as how people choose to travel. Parking must therefore be properly thought through as part of a design-led approach.

A successful parking strategy depends on careful detailing, landscaping and lighting. Car Parking: What Works Where? (English Partnerships) is a very useful toolkit. The 'golden rules' set out in the document are below.

- provide cycle parking to all parking solutions that is safe and secure; and
- don't forget Secured by Design principles.

Car Parking: What Works Where, English Partnerships, 2006.

The number of parking spaces provided will, in part, be determined by local planning policy. However, the provider's preferred designs may differ from local planning policy requirements. Being able to demonstrate in the Design and Access Statement that the submitted designs are a result of careful thought will assist those negotiations.

Golden rules for parking

- Go for the quality of the street above all else. So where you put the parking is more significant than how much;
- There isn't a single best solution. A combination of on-plot, off-plot and on-street solutions will be needed according to location, topography and the market;
- Rediscover the street as a beautiful car park – people understand how it works, it is efficient and it increases the activity and safety of the street;
- Do not locate parking at the back of the block until on-street and frontage parking permutations have been exhausted. Use of the mews or rear court should support on-street provision, not replace it;
- Avoid allocating more than half of parking spaces. Research by Noble and Jenks[2] shows that the more spaces you allocate, the more you have to provide; and
- There are now three types of on-street parking: uncontrolled, controlled parking zones (CPZ) where spaces can be defined by user and or by times and restricted parking zones (RPZ) where positive parking control does not rely on yellow lines.

[2] Noble & Jenks (1996) Parking: Demand and Provision in Private Housing Development, published by Oxford School of Architecture, Oxford Brookes University.

A range of parking solutions should be provided (shared parking areas, on-plot parking and on-street parking), that balances a number of issues:

- provides parking spaces close to a residents' homes;
- encourages residents to access their vehicles from the front door rather than rear door as far as possible;
- provides overlooked parking for residents; and
- supports the character of the place by providing parking areas that are of high quality and reasonably attractive.

Parking squares or courtyards should not be visually dominating, and so should have a limited number of bays – up to about ten spaces but probably not more (see the section below: Courtyard Parking). The groups should be separated by soft or hard landscaping or street furniture.

Cycle parking, visitor and disabled parking should also be provided as part of an integrated parking strategy.

On-street parking

On-street parking increases activity on the street as different people use it at different times of day. It can also act as a buffer between the footway and the road. It can be easily overlooked, providing a level of security and it tends to be popular and well-used. However, it can dominate the street scene visually and it can be difficult to control parking on the kerb and across accesses to dwellings.

Well-designed on-street parking bays should be part of the parking strategy for a development.

Parking arrangements should not form barriers for pedestrians, cyclists or other users, for example, refuse or removal trucks.

Courtyard parking

Courtyard parking can work well, although English Partnerships' Golden Rule No. 5 should be noted: do not locate parking at the back of the block until on-street and frontage parking permutations have been exhausted. Use of the mews or rear court should support on street provision, not replace it.

There are three main characteristics of successful courtyard parking:

- courtyards are not car parks but places which have parking in them, they should be functional and attractive in their own right;
- they are overlooked by adjoining houses or by buildings entered from the parking area; and
- they include at most 10 parking spaces – if there are more spaces the courtyard layout should be broken up.

Manual for the Streets

Off-plot parking should be well lit with a safe route between the space and home.

In-curtilage (on-plot) parking

A parking bay within the curtilage of each dwelling meets the aspiration of residents to have their car close, secure and visible, but can have a negative effect on the visual quality of the street. It can also limit on-street parking and in some cases blur, and sometimes physically obstruct, the boundary between the footway and private space.

Underground parking

While this option may be more expensive, it is appropriate in some cases and may be more convenient for residents.

Undercroft parking may be better provided as a garage, but should share the ground floor with a window and front door to a habitable room to preserve an active frontage.

In some cases, changes in ground levels can be exploited to provide undercroft car parking at reduced cost. Access to undercroft car parking should be controlled, not only for vehicles but also for pedestrians.

Inconsiderate parking

If parking is not available where people want to use it, informal parking on the kerb or other places can occur. This should be prevented through careful design of the street and other areas, clearly showing where people can park and using planters or bollards to deter inappropriate parking. This will avoid introducing barriers to people with buggies, wheelchairs etc.

Where there are shared surfaces, people might park inappropriately. Clearly marking parking bays by a change of materials and careful design of the hard and soft landscaping and street furniture will deter this.

Summary of expectations

- A range of parking solutions should be provided (shared parking areas, on-plot parking and on-street parking), that balances a number of issues:
  - provides parking spaces close to residents' homes;
  - encourages residents to access their vehicles from the front door rather than rear door as far as possible;
  - provides overlooked parking for residents; and
  - support the character of the place by providing parking areas that are of high quality and reasonably attractive.
- Parking should not form barriers for pedestrians, cyclists or other users, for example, refuse or removal trucks;
- Where courtyard parking is used the design should reflect the following principles:
  - courtyards are not car parks but places which have parking in them, eg they should be functional and attractive in their own right;
  - they are overlooked by adjoining houses or by buildings entered from the parking area; and
  - they include at most ten parking spaces – if there are more spaces the courtyard layout should be broken up.
- Off-plot parking should be well lit with a safe route between the space and the home; and
- Careful design of the street and other areas should clearly show where people can park.

Fig 23: A grim place – although it is overlooked (Dominic Church).

Fig 24

Fig 25

Fig 26. Figures 24-26 show examples of inconsiderate parking (Dominic Church).

Question 13

Are the streets pedestrian, cycle and vehicle friendly?

Guidance

Tip

Pedestrian and cycle friendly streets can be measured on the 5Cs principles:

- Connections: do the pedestrian routes connect the places where people want to go?
- Convenience: are routes direct, and are crossings easy to use?
- Convivial: are routes attractive, well lit and safe, and is there variety along the street?
- Comfortable: what is the quality and width of the footway, and what obstructions are there?
- Conspicuousness: how easy is it to find and follow a route, and are there surface treatments and signs to guide pedestrians?

Urban Design Compendium

Each street should be designed as a community space, according to its role in the new development and the wider neighbourhood.

Residential streets should provide a low speed environment. Traffic calming should stem from the building layout and the design of each street rather than add-ons such as sleeping policemen and bollards.

Generally, all users should be able to safely share the same routes unless there is a particular reason for separating a pedestrian or car route, as it promotes surveillance and safety.

Fig 27: An example of a people-friendly street that works as a community space, not just a route for vehicles (Dominic Church).

Pedestrian priority

Streets are the most used form of public space and they need to work well for everyone. The design should balance and meet the needs for all relevant users including pedestrians, cycles, cars and larger vehicles such as refuse trucks.

Tip
The Manual for Streets says:

3.6.8: It is recommended that the design of a scheme should follow the user hierarchy shown in Table 3.2 below.

Consider first	Pedestrians
	Cyclists
	Public transport users
	Specialist services (eg emergency services, waste etc)
Consider last	Other motor traffic

3.6.9: The hierarchy is not meant to be rigidly applied and does not necessarily mean that it is always more important to provide for pedestrians than it is for the other modes. However, they should at least be considered first, followed by consideration for the others in the order given. This helps ensure that the street will serve all of its users in a balanced way. There may be situations where some upper-tier modes are not provided for – for example, buses might not need to be accommodated in a short, narrow section of street where access for cars is required.

However, when designing streets the needs of pedestrians should be considered first.

Accommodating the movement of motor vehicles should not be the dominant factor.

Reducing vehicle speeds results in safer environments and there is a range of methods which contribute to pedestrian, cycle and vehicle-friendly streets. For example:

- the buildings can be positioned so as to slow traffic;
- surface materials, landscaping, lighting and street furniture can be used to indicate pedestrian priority;
- chicanes or changes in the direction of the road;
- constriction or narrowing of the carriageway;
- short ahead views or interrupted sight lines;
- changes of priority at junctions;
- bollards or street furniture close to the road;
- minimal traffic signs and paint markings to emphasise pedestrian priority and reduced traffic speeds;
- trees and landscape features;
- the presence of people – lively active streets which are well-used and overlooked; and
- a 20mph or lower speed limit.

Supporting cycling

The 5Cs also apply to cyclists who need clear direct routes that are free of obstructions. The design team should consider whether each street works for pedestrians (including those with disabilities), cyclists and vehicles, or if there

should be some separation. The lower the speed of a street, the more suitable it is for sharing.

The scheme should provide suitable secure cycle parking or storage spaces at home, at shops or other destinations to make cycle routes attractive and to discourage residents from carrying their cycles upstairs to their homes.

Fig 28: Street design that encourages drivers to slow down (Dominic Church).

Ensuring fire engines can get through

Designing for people first is fine, but ambulances, fire engines and refuse trucks all need to be able to get through.

The approach can be characterised as one of encouraging people-friendly layouts, which are probably vehicle-unfriendly, but demonstrating that the layout is (just) passable by emergency and refuse vehicles.

A technique called Swept Path Analysis (also known as 'tracking') tests whether a restricted roadway is in fact passable by vehicles. If it is, the design can be said to work, even if the vehicles have to move slowly and carefully to move along the road or navigate a junction – now seen as a 'good thing', not a 'bad thing'. This can be contrasted with the previous approach, eg pre-Manual for Streets, 2007. This had been to set road widths, sight lines etc that made it as easy as possible for vehicles to move. This ease of passage translated into relatively high speeds – which were antipathetic to pedestrians and cyclists.

Swept Path Analysis may be a useful tool for Providers to use when demonstrating to highway engineers that their people-friendly designs also satisfy the requirements for larger vehicles.

Tip

When Great Places Homes Group implemented a Home Zone in their Gold Award-winning Northmoor scheme in Manchester, they found that the percentage of residents who chatted informally in the street rose from 4% to 20%. This is seen as a significant strengthening of the local community.

Home Zones are areas designed to be shared by pedestrians and cars. The street is designed to accommodate play, social activity, vehicle movement and car parking. Speeds are limited

to a maximum of 20mph and the street may have seating, planting, trees and surfaces which indicate shared use. Parking is in marked spaces only.

Streets can be formally designated as Home Zones by the local authority. The formal definition of a Home Zone is:

> "A road in a Home Zone is a place where the whole of the space is available for a range of different uses. The speed of vehicles must be low enough to satisfy the local traffic authority that any permitted activities may be enjoyed safely by people of all ages and abilities. Designated roads should be recognised as places where prescribed local activities may be carried out, as well as being public thoroughfares."
>
> Department of Transport Circular, February 2006

Summary of expectations

- Each street should be designed as a community space, according to its role in the new development and the wider neighbourhood;
- Traffic calming should stem from the building layout and the design of each street rather than add-ons such as sleeping policemen, bollards etc;
- Generally all users should share the same routes unless there is a particular reason for separating a pedestrian or car route;
- When designing streets the needs of pedestrians should be considered first. Accommodating the movement of motor vehicles should not be the dominant factor;
- Consider whether each street works for pedestrians (including those with disabilities), cyclists and vehicles or if there should be some separation;
- The scheme should provide suitable secure cycle parking or storage spaces at home, at shops or other destinations; and
- Consider designing streets as Home Zones.

Question 14

Does the scheme integrate with existing roads, paths and surrounding development?

Guidance

A question of scale?

The guidance in this section generally applies to urban, suburban and rural schemes. Regardless of location, each scheme should connect as well as possible to its surrounding neighbourhood. The issue of 'connections' for a small infill site will obviously be much more limited than one for a major town extension, but the principles apply at all scales.

The well-connected neighbourhood

A key factor in the success of a neighbourhood depends on its connections and accessibility.

"Best practice in design, and lessons that we have learnt from places that work well and do sustain themselves, focuses on the idea of an urban structure based on walkable mixed use neighbourhoods with interconnected street patterns to facilitate movement and to disperse traffic."

Manual for Streets, 2007

'Well-connected' means that residents have a choice of routes and modes of transport to get to where they want to go.

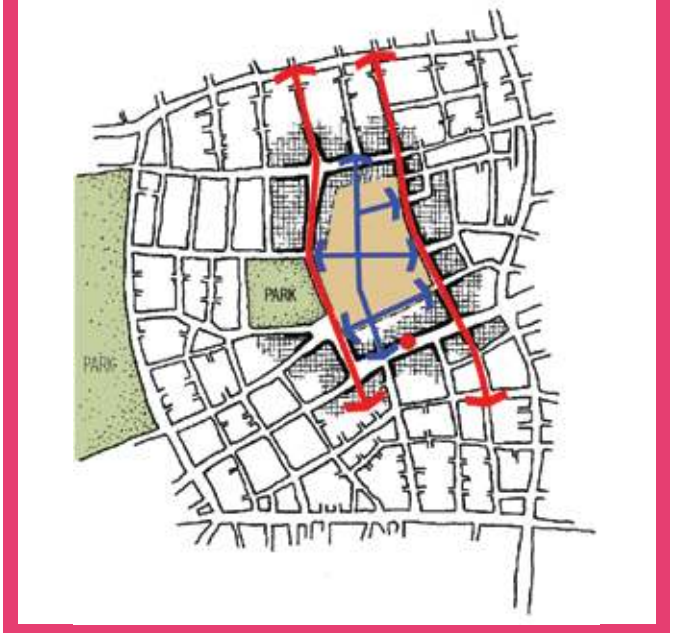
A choice of routes is self-explanatory; a choice of mode of transport is primarily aimed at expanding the range of transport options beyond simply the private car. In other words, public transport, car-sharing schemes, cycling and walking.

The development should be well-connected to the existing road, street and footpath network, strengthening links to existing and new facilities and the places people need or want to get to such as a health centre, bus and train stops, shops and schools. Clearly the opportunity to influence this connectedness will depend on the size and scale of the scheme. There are also different constraints and possibilities depending on whether the scheme is located in an urban, suburban or rural location.

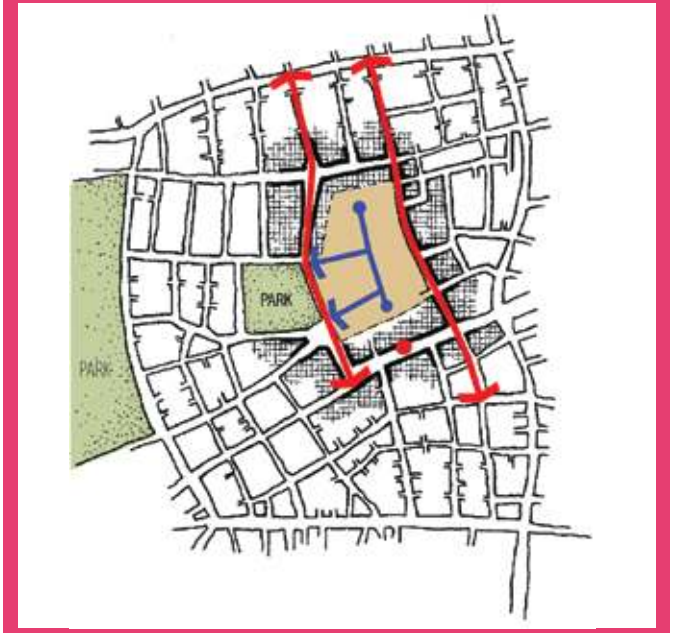
Question 11 introduced the following expectations that are also relevant to this question:

- at the outset of designing a scheme, clients and designers should consider how pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles need to move in and across the neighbourhood; and

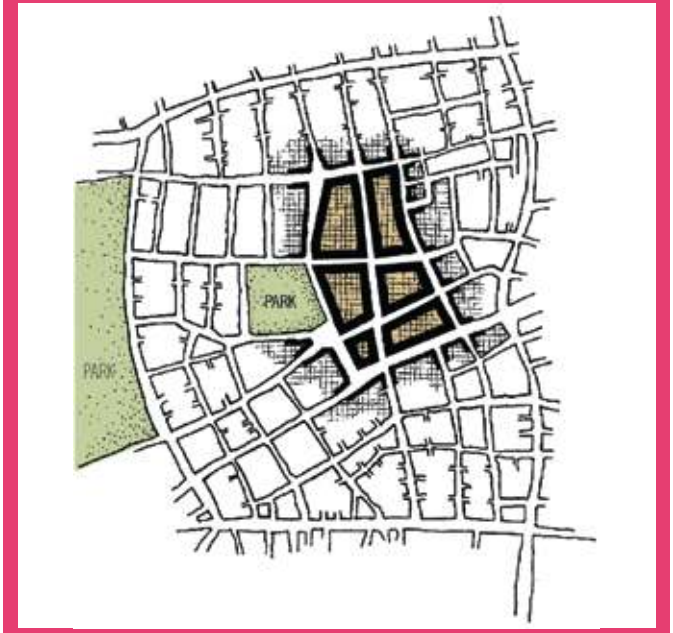
Consider how best the site can be connected with nearby main routes and public transport facilities.



A more pedestrian-friendly approach that integrates with the surrounding community links existing and proposed streets, and provides direct links to bus stops.



The typical cul-de-sac response creates an introverted layout, which fails to integrate with the surroundings.



This street pattern then forms the basis for perimeter blocks, which ensure that buildings contribute positively to the public realm.

- The scheme should successfully connect scheme roads, streets or paths for vehicles, cycles and pedestrians with existing routes in the surrounding area while discouraging the formation of vehicle 'rat runs' through the scheme.

This involves understanding how people are likely to want to move within the scheme, and between the scheme and the local neighbourhood. The following extract from the Urban Design Compendium illustrates these points for a larger scheme:

Routes

Routes should:

- lead where people want to go (local desire lines);
- be as short and direct as possible; and
- be as amenable and pleasant as possible.

The scheme should be accessible and easy to move around.

Permeability and security

Good connections encourage people to walk more and use cars less. This results in a 'permeable' layout, which support active, well-used streets and reinforce a sense of place and community, and can significantly reduce the fear of crime – more people walking the streets results in fewer opportunities for petty crime.

However, there are limits. Local security issues will definitely be a factor when considering how permeable the development should be. However, the designs should provide active streets and clear public, shared/communal and private spaces which seek to engender feelings of ownership and responsibility in local people rather than designing defensively.

Terminology
"Permeability – The degree to which an area has a variety of pleasant, convenient and safe routes through it."

Safer Places (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and Home Office, 2004)

Tip
The Safer Places guidance (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Home Office, 2004) is helpful when considering how to ensure connections are appropriate.

Public space

As part of the analysis of the site's local neighbourhood, the public open space provision in the wider neighbourhood should be reviewed to see how any new open spaces in the scheme

Fig 29: An attractive, sunny, well-overlooked small public space (Dominic Church).

Fig 30: An informal meeting place (Dominic Church).

could contribute to and integrate into the area. On larger schemes, a green space strategy is useful to determine the range and intended uses of spaces to be provided and which are open to the wider community.

Public spaces/parks do not need to be large parks to be of benefit to promote social interaction and community spirit. A tiny well placed and designed area with a couple of benches, sunny aspect and located adjoining a thoroughfare can often be of much use and appreciated by residents and the neighbourhood.

Summary of expectations

- The scheme should be accessible and easy to move around;
- The scheme designs should provide active streets and clearly defined public, shared/ communal and private spaces which seek to engender feelings of ownership and responsibility in local people; and
- As part of the analysis of the site's local neighbourhood, the public open space provision in the wider neighbourhood should be reviewed and how any new open spaces in the development will contribute to and integrate into the area.

Expectations from Question 11 that also apply to this question

- At the outset of designing a scheme, clients and designers should consider how pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles need to move in and across the neighbourhood taking account of:

    - the places people want to get to, such as local schools, shops, public transport stops etc;
    - how local people are likely to want to use the space; and
    - the different needs of people.

- Ensure that the scheme successfully connects scheme roads, streets or paths for vehicles, cycles and pedestrians with existing routes in the surrounding area while discouraging the formation of vehicle ‘rat runs’.

Question 15

Are public spaces and pedestrian routes overlooked and do they feel safe?

Guidance

Building for Life, Secured by Design and Safer Places

The guidance contained within this guide, Secured by Design and the ODPM/Home Office's Safer Places: the Planning System and Crime Prevention (April 2004) will help to ensure a well-planned, attractive and clearly defined environment which deters anti-social and criminal activity.

See www.securedbydesign.com and www.crimereduction.homeoffice.gov.uk

Annex 2 of Safer Places provides a very useful and interesting summary of current thinking on the balances to be struck in designing effectively to reduce crime and the fear of crime. In particular, it addresses the 'defensible space' versus permeability argument that is 40 years old. It is worth noting that child density has a much greater effect on levels of crime that, for example, providing defensible space, and that permeability is seen to be beneficial – up to a point, in many but not all circumstances. The conclusion, of course, is that the issue is complex, site specific and cannot be addressed by a set of rigid rules. However, good design does contribute to security and a sense of safety.

NB: The guidance in these three documents is not exactly the same. Some Police Architectural Liaison Officers' views about permeability differ – from each other's, from this guide, from the Safer Places guidance, and from some providers' preferences. This may pose some challenges for a provider seeking a Secured by Design certificate for a scheme.

Although it is not a Housing Corporation requirement to require a Secured by Design certificate on grant-funded schemes, some local planning authorities may require it. However, if the provider is able to explain that its proposals are in accordance with the requirements of Safer Places (which is Government guidance for planners) and this guide, will have a very strong argument. Where there are difficult negotiations, Annex 2 of Safer Places may well help.

Well-designed public areas

Good design and layout contributes significantly to how safe and secure people feel in an environment and to the prevention of crime and anti-social behaviour. Public and shared/communal spaces and pedestrian routes should be overlooked and well-used at all times of the day – ensuring that there are 'eyes on the street'. A mix of dwelling types catering for different household types in the scheme/immediate neighbourhood should also mean that that passive surveillance operates throughout the day.

Seven attributes of sustainable communities that are particularly relevant to crime prevention are set out below.

- Access and movement: places with well defined routes, spaces and entrances that provide for convenient movement without compromising security;
- Structure: places that are structured so that different uses do not cause conflict;
- Surveillance: places where all publicly accessible spaces are overlooked;
- Ownership: places that promote a sense of ownership, respect, territorial responsibility and community;
- Physical protection: places that include necessary, well-designed security features;
- Activity: places where the level of human activity is appropriate to the location and creates a reduced risk of crime and a sense of safety at all times;
- Management and maintenance: places that are designed with management and maintenance in mind, to discourage crime in the present and the future.

Safer Places

Public, private and shared (communal) spaces

What are the differences between these areas?

Public space is that which is open to all, whether the people are residents or not. Examples are public roads, streets, parks, play areas etc. Areas adopted by the local authority will be public spaces by definition.

Shared/communal spaces are those dedicated to a specific group of households, only they – or the people they authorise, such as visitors – have any right to be there. Examples are communal gardens, private roads/streets, rear alleyways, rear parking courtyards.

Private spaces are those dedicated to one household, and only they – or the people they authorise, such as visitors – have any right to be there. Examples are private gardens, inside the dwelling, private balconies etc.

Clearly defined private, shared/communal and public space helps people find their way around and makes it obvious when people are where they shouldn't be.

Engendering feelings of ownership

Of course these classifications of public, shared/communal and private can be become blurred in psychological terms. Good design helps to foster a sense of ownership by residents, so that (ideally) they feel strongly that shared/communal spaces are 'theirs', rather than shrugging their shoulders and thinking it is someone else's business. Indeed, when it works well, residents may feel a degree of ownership in their street, even if it is formally the public highway. So the design should clearly show:

- the status of all spaces – public, shared/communal or private;
- clear and easily recognisable boundaries between them…

… in order to encourage residents to feel as strong a sense of ownership as possible of all spaces within the scheme.

In addition, all public and shared/communal spaces should be overlooked as much as reasonably possible.

Fig 31 and 32: Where does the private space for this flat end, and the shared/communal space begin? Could there not have been some clearly marked defensible private space? (HATC)

Buildings

The safety and security issues relating to building arrangements, and the relevant expectations, are covered in Question 10; see the guidance there.

Active frontages

The safety and security issues relating to building frontages, and the relevant expectations, are covered in Question 10; see the guidance there.

Parking

This is covered more extensively in Question 12. See the guidance there.

Caring for the public realm

The management and maintenance arrangements for the public realm should be addressed early on in the scheme design to ensure that they are properly cared for over the lifetime of the scheme. Areas which are not obviously well cared for will be used less often, and can offer opportunities for anti-social behaviour.

Lighting

What will the street or space be like at night? Is there enough lighting for people to feel safe? Studies show that good lighting contributes significantly more to a feeling of safety than CCTV cameras. The design team should demonstrate street level views along routes at night so that this can be assessed. Light levels should be sufficient and fairly even across a scheme. Too much or too little direct light can make it difficult to see.

Summary of expectations

The design should provide a feeling of safety by:

- clearly showing the status of all spaces – public, shared/communal or private;
- providing clear and easily recognisable boundaries between all spaces;
- designing public and communal spaces and parking so that they are overlooked as much as reasonably possible; and
- the scheme should provide light levels that are sufficient and fairly even across a scheme.

Part IV
Design and construction

Question 16

Is public space well designed and does it have suitable management arrangements in place?

Guidance

This question does not address issues of private open space, only shared/communal and public open space.

The types of space (public, shared/communal and private) are defined in Question 15.

For this question, public space means all areas that are open to the public, eg the streets and the designated open space. How to ensure design quality for streets is covered in the guidance for Questions 6 to 10.

The public and shared/communal open spaces should be appropriate for the number and types of homes provided and the needs of different groups.

Spaces with a purpose – not just leftovers

Public and shared/communal open space that works well is not simply SLOAP – Space Left Over After Planning the buildings. To work well it has to be positively designed. Of course, the size of the scheme will in large part determine the range of spaces provided, but the overall principle of all space being an intrinsic part of a successful development is important.

Positive design means identifying early on (preferably in the initial brief) what public and shared/communal open spaces are required in the scheme and what the intended use of each one is. Examples of different uses that different spaces may offer, and some associated issues that need resolving before the space is planned, are:

- Shared/communal open spaces:
  - For which specific groups of households?
  - For which age groups?
  - For relaxation or recreational activities or both?
- Public open areas:
  - To facilitate movement?
  - To offer opportunities for relaxation?
  - To facilitate recreational activities?
  - Or all three?

Clearly identifying the use(s) the space is for will help guide the designer in decisions such as its best location and whether the landscaping should be hard or soft and if it will require specific structures or buildings (such as play area equipment, fencing, ‘thresholds’ etc).

These design decisions, however, should not be taken in a theoretical vacuum. The analysis of the scheme’s local neighbourhood should include a review of existing public space in the locality, its use, quality of use and what public space the new development will provide. Similarly, the site may have some existing assets which will help guide the open space strategy. The design can create

visual links from an open space or a seating area on a street.

Designs should therefore be prepared in the light of the provider's brief that sets the requirements for open space, and should show:

- the uses of each space;
- the groups it will serve; and
- the future ownership of the space(s).

Design quality for open space

Just like the rest of the public realm in the development, open space should have good lighting and high quality, durable design and finishes in the materials used, such as the street furniture and planting.

Materials and street furniture should be such that they will wear well and be easy to maintain.

Remember to use native species in order to help reduce the environmental impact of the project.

It is important that the elements of the open space are carefully designed. What are these elements? They may be play area equipment, bicycle racks and stores, refuse collection points, seats and seating areas, street lighting, signage as well as soft landscaping elements such as trees, planting areas and grass areas.

"Design quality in housing is not just the design of the blocks or the streets, it is also the landscape, the open spaces, water, movement corridors… parks, squares and streets; it is the street furniture; it is hard and it is soft.

"A key design principle is to treat everything as landscape; buildings define the edge of space; landscape occupies the space, whether it is a park, a street, a fence or a pavement."

Urban Design Compendium

"This is not a numbers game involving the developer in providing a certain percentage of open space. Our best-loved urban parks and gardens are often intimate in scale and well cared for. There needs to be adequate green and open spaces to take a pleasant stroll, have a kick-about and provide habitats for wildlife to thrive, but it is the quality rather than the quantity. Landscape is not just vandal-proof planting, un-mown grass and a maintenance headache. It is a route to civic pride."

Urban Design Compendium

'Careful design' means different things for different elements. For some, such as refuse collection points and street lighting, it is likely to mean that they are as visually unobtrusive as possible, whilst being easy to use and very useful. For others, such as seating areas and cycle racks, they will need to be well overlooked and so highly

visible. This enhances the need for them to be as aesthetically pleasing as possible as well as being located in positions which reflect residents' preferences, eg that they are useful, and so used, not ignored or abused.

Figures 33 and 34: Two examples of how a lack of attention to the detailed arrangement of these 'interface elements' can have a very detrimental effect on the visual quality of places (Dominic Church).

Suitable management arrangements

A long-term funded maintenance plan with clear lines of responsibility and accountability is critical to the success of any open space.

Each open space should have appropriate management arrangements in place from the outset, as evidenced by a management plan.

The management plan should:

- be prepared in parallel with the design of the open spaces – not afterwards - and owned by those responsible for implementing it after the scheme is completed;
- use predictions of long-term costs that are realistic in the light of the proposed designs for public and open space;
- have these realistic costings incorporated into the scheme financial viability assessment (to ensure that the maintenance plan is adequately resourced); and
- the provider's internal budgetary arrangements should ensure that that level of funding is actually made available when the scheme is in operation.

This isn't easy, but the worst-case scenario is to provide open space that is then neglected and becomes a focus for anti-social behaviour. Careful thought can avoid this happening.

Summary of expectations

- Public and shared/communal open spaces should be appropriate for the number and types of homes provided and the needs of different groups;
- Designs should clearly show:
  - the uses of each space;
  - the groups it will serve; and
  - the future ownership of the space(s);
- Materials and street furniture should be such that they will wear well and be easy to maintain;
- Each open space should have appropriate management arrangements in place from the outset, as evidenced by a management plan which should:
  - be prepared in parallel with the design of the open spaces – not afterwards – and owned by those responsible for implementing it after the scheme is completed;
  - use predictions of long-term costs that are realistic in the light of the proposed designs for public and open space; and
  - have these realistic costings incorporated into the scheme financial viability assessment (to ensure that the maintenance plan is adequately resourced); and
- The provider's internal budgetary arrangements should ensure that that level of funding is actually made available when the scheme is in operation.

Expectations from Question 14 that also apply to this question

- As part of the analysis of the site's local neighbourhood, the public open space provision in the wider neighbourhood should be reviewed and how any new open spaces in the development will contribute to and integrate into the area.

Expectations from Question 15 that also apply to this question

- Clearly show the status of all spaces – public, shared/communal or private;
- Provide clear and easily recognisable boundaries between all spaces; and
- Design public and communal spaces and parking so that they are overlooked as much as reasonably possible.

Question 17

Do the buildings exhibit architectural quality?

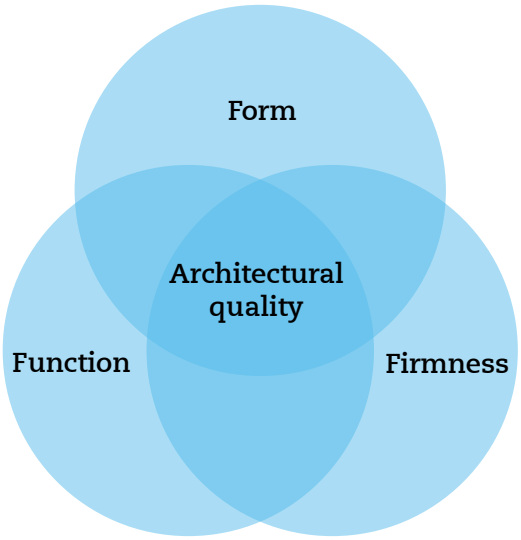
Guidance

What is 'architectural quality'?

It's not quite as subjective as it sounds. Architectural quality has three elements:

- Is it pleasing to the eye and mind?
- Is it strong and will it last?
- Does it (the building or the space) work well?

These three issues are sometimes referred to alliteratively as form, firmness and function:



All three aspects have to be present for a building or a space to exhibit architectural quality – all three are equally important. A dwelling that is very attractive to look at from the outside but which is cramped, dark or is difficult to keep warm, would not meet this requirement (good on form; poor on function). Neither would a play area (or a dwelling) that is very attractive and works well when new, but which keeps breaking down or is not sustainable in the long run (good on form; poor on firmness).

Functionality and firmness (durability) are issues that affordable housing providers have focused on for very many years – they are very familiar. Form, however, has been seen as less of a priority and so this guidance begins with it.

Form – Is the scheme aesthetically pleasing?

Is this not in the eye of the beholder and beyond definition?

Yes.

Fortunately it is more realistic to say that this aspect of the question does not demand schemes that are universally acclaimed as beautiful, although the aspiration is that as many schemes as possible are admired.

This aspect of the question does, however, seek to exclude schemes that are positively bland or plain ugly. This is rather more achievable.

The architectural design (composition, materials and proportions) should have a degree of visual appeal and enhance an unattractive

neighbourhood or maintain, at least, the quality of an attractive neighbourhood.

It is worth noting that designs in the 'current style' do not necessarily add up to good-quality architecture. Curved roofs (as in the illustrations from the Building Futures, Hertfordshire County Council, in the guidance for Question 1) were prevalent in the 1990s. They may be seen as visually appealing over the long term, or simply dated, after a while.

What aspects of design are likely to result in a building that has a degree of visual appeal? Some tips (from the Guide to Standards and Quality, National Housing Federation, 2008) are:

- provide variety in wall materials in a manner that recognises local traditional materials and styles, rather than apparently arbitrary variations simply for effect;
- use a limited selection of materials in external walls to achieve a specific purpose, such as marking the top and bottom of a wall or highlighting openings (headers/cills: see below);
- think about materials which residents are likely to touch or view from very close quarters. Is it important that materials and finishes are pleasing to see and touch?
- think about proportions of buildings, spaces and their constituent elements. Formats which are horizontal or vertical will be experienced very differently. There are some proportions, such as the 'golden ratio' (about 5:8), which have evolved over the centuries and have been recognised as being particularly pleasing;
- think about providing visual interest to elevations through some surface relief (not being a completely smooth surface);
- think about materials which are rough or smooth and how these can be used to create a desired effect in terms of weathering, touch and feel, and catching or reflecting the light;
- consider creating depth in the façade and elevations by setting back doors and windows in their openings in ways that do not reduce security (see Figures 36 and 37);
- clearly define openings in external walls, for example, detail headers or cills with stone, special bricks or soldier courses;
- steeper pitched roofs (> 35°) are visible from the ground and can be used to increase the visual presence of buildings; and
- the junction between the roof and wall (the eaves/verge) is very important.

Fig 36: The elevation on the left is flat. The right one offers 'surface relief' by setting back the windows a little (HATC/Jan Randall).

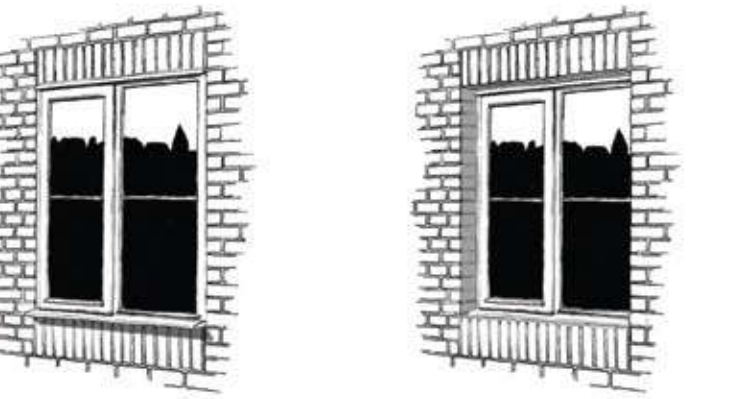


Fig 37: 'Surface relief' shown close up (HATC/Jan Randall).

Fig 38: 92% of RSL development staff polled preferred the eaves on the right (HATC).

Figs 39: 76% of RSL development staff polled preferred the right elevation where the first floor windows are bigger (HATC).

Tip

The features where detailing will most contribute to the appearance of a building are:

- detailing to windows and door openings;
- detailing to emphasise setbacks;
- angle of roof pitches; and
- eaves detailing.

As ever, the truism 'we get what we pay for' applies to detailing. Put another way, small financial savings on these details can have heavy costs in terms of visual appeal.

Fenestration

The fenestration has a huge effect on the visual appeal of dwellings. It is generally very difficult to provide small windows without the property appearing 'mean'. Similarly, the regularity – or irregularity – of the layout of windows can also have a large effect on their appeal. Fortunately, design solutions which help the 'form' are also likely to help the 'functionality' of dwellings. Larger windows generally make for a brighter, more attractive and useful internal environment and are highly valued by residents.

Terminology

Fenestration – the sizes, shapes and layout of the windows in an elevation.

Higher standards of thermal insulation of the building envelope (such as required by Level 3 and above of the Code for Sustainable Homes) may tempt some designers to reduce the sizes of window openings. This could significantly reduce the visual appeal of the scheme, as well as the resident's amenity. The provider will need to balance carefully the requirements of the Code with the need to provide windows that offer both light and attractive internal environments and external visual appeal.

The fenestration should therefore contribute to an attractive external appearance of the buildings while providing residents with a high level of amenity.

Repetition – good or bad?

Good design often provides streetscapes with some attractive repetition and is called 'visual rhythm'. As ever, there needs to be a balance between such rhythm and the need for some variety. This can be achieved by detailing elevations (see the guidance in Question 6).

Of course, bland elevations that are repeated will not provide an attractive appearance. This is a particular risk when using standard house types. As well as needing to 'respond positively to the local context' (Question 6), detailing needs to be carefully considered if repetition is to work well.

Firm - is the scheme durable?

The following requirements are likely to be undertaken by providers as a matter of course, but are necessary for compliance with this question:

- construction details to be well executed across the development;
- materials are chosen that weather well, without adversely affecting the appearance of the buildings or spaces over time; and
- the materials, components and systems in the development should be robust and have reasonably long lifespans.

Compliance with Part F (Costs in Use) of the National Housing Federation's Guide to Standards and Quality in New Development (2008) would show a clear commitment to minimising lifecycle costs.

Is the scheme functional – does it work?

Residents and visitors need to feel safe outside their dwelling when moving around the scheme. This is an important aspect of functionality. This is largely achieved by maximising the potential for 'eyes on streets'. This issue is also addressed elsewhere (Question 10) and the following requirement is repeated there:

The scheme should avoid having blank areas or façades facing on to the street or public space. Use bay windows and carefully designed corner buildings to provide more opportunities for

overlooking and passive surveillance (for more details, see the guidance on active frontages in Question 10).

Internally, dwellings are likely to be functional if they meet the internal environment requirements of the Housing Corporation's Design and Quality Standards, although meeting higher standards such as Parts D, E and H in the National Housing Federation's Guide to Standards and Quality in New Development (2008) would show a greater commitment to functionality.

Summary of expectations

- The architectural design (composition, materials and proportions) should have a degree of visual appeal and enhance an unattractive neighbourhood, or maintain (at least) the quality of an attractive neighbourhood;
- The fenestration should contribute to an attractive external appearance of the buildings while relating strongly to the internal layout in order to provide good daylight levels throughout the home; and
- Providers should ensure that:
  - construction details are well executed across the development;
  - the scheme uses materials that wear and weather well, without adversely affecting the appearance of the buildings or spaces over time; and
  - the materials, components and systems in the development are robust and have reasonably long life spans.

Expectations from Question 10 that also apply to the question

- The scheme should avoid having blank areas or façades facing the street or public space; and
- The scheme should use bay or other projecting windows and carefully designed corner buildings to provide more opportunities for overlooking and passive surveillance throughout the day.

Question 18

Do internal spaces and layout allow for adaptation, conversion or extension?

Guidance

Designing for change

Providers' schemes should reasonably be expected to have a life of about 100 years or more. To achieve this longevity, however, schemes need to be able to adapt to changing times. The characteristics of houses and blocks of flats that have survived for this period of time suggest that the factors that offer longevity are:

Convertibility:

- from one dwelling type to another, typically the conversion of a house into flats and, quite often, its subsequent de-conversion back into a house;
- from housing use to office and/or retail use, and often back again, often with upper floors converted to flats; and
- integral garages capable of being converted into habitable rooms.

Adaptability:

- within the building envelope as built: dwellings that can be used by different household types, from families with a number of children of different ages and both sexes, to older, less mobile residents; and
- by extending the as-built building envelope. This may be by bringing a loft space into use, building to the side or the rear of the property, adding another floor either on top of the building or by introducing/bringing into use a basement.

How can adaptability and convertibility be enhanced?

Convertibility

This is enhanced by:

- more space – a larger footprint;
- stacking the services, kitchens and bathrooms to make future adaptation of the habitable rooms easier;
- use of open roof structure (eg rafter and purlin roof structure without cross-bracing, rather than roof trusses) to allow roof space to be used in the future;
- reduction in, or avoidance of internal load-bearing walls: some construction methods (for example, steel or concrete frame) makes larger spaces possible between load-bearing walls;
- fenestration that permits large rooms to be subdivided in the future into smaller rooms, each with a suitable window – this avoids the need for additional window opening to be made in an ad hoc manner in the future, damaging the street's appearance;
- greater floor-ceiling height at ground floor level to permit change of use;

- foundation design that allows for the additional load of an extra storey in the future; and
- providing space to the side and/or rear of the property for future extension.

Adaptability

This is enhanced by a number of things, many of which also feature in the convertibility list above:

- more space – a larger footprint;
- complying with the 16 Lifetime Homes criteria;
- stacking the services, kitchens and bathrooms to make future adaptation of the habitable rooms easier;
- arranging the room layout (positioning and separation) so that they are capable of being used flexibly – allowing different members of the household to do different things at the same time;
- use of open roof structure (eg attic trusses roof structure without cross-bracing, rather than roof trusses) to allow roof space to be used in the future;
- providing space to the side and/or rear of the property for future extension; and
- foundation design that allows for the additional load of an extra storey in the future.

Summary of expectations

The scheme should be designed to enhance adaptation, conversion and/or extension by (in priority order):

- a larger footprint (eg larger than good-practice standards such as the indicative minimum swelling areas in the National Housing Federation's Guide to Standards and Quality in Development 2008 edition), especially a wider frontage (>5.7 m) for terraced or semi-detached houses;
- full compliance with the 16 Lifetime Homes criteria;
- arranging the room layout (positioning and separation) so that they are capable of being used flexibly;
- stacking the services, kitchens and bathrooms to make future adaptation of the habitable rooms easier;
- use of open roof structure to allow roof space to be used in the future;
- reduction in, or avoidance of internal load-bearing walls;
- fenestration that permits large rooms to be subdivided in the future into smaller rooms, each with a suitable window;
- greater floor-ceiling height at ground floor to permit change of use;
- providing space to the side and/or rear of the property for future extension; and
- foundation design that allows for the additional load of an extra storey in the future.

Question 19

Has the scheme made use of advances in construction or technology that enhance its performance, quality and attractiveness?

Guidance

This question is aimed at identifying the extent to which the provider has investigated and uses improved products and processes. A successful approach to the question may therefore be at the programme level as well as the project level.

What might demonstrate that the question is being positively addressed? Doing things differently from the 'usual way'.

There is a balance here – as in so many things. This question does not seek new approaches every month; that is unrealistic and probably counter-productive. However, it seeks to identify whether new systems and components or new ways of delivering schemes that offer improvements in efficiency and quality have been implemented. Formally, this is known as value management. Value management is "a well-established methodology for defining and maximising value for money. It can be applied to any type of project regardless of size or timeframe and at all stages throughout the life cycle of the project from inception to completion" (VM in Construction, Office of Government Commerce, 2007).

Put another way, providers who rarely review and update how they can improve the efficiency and quality of the project are unlikely to meet the expectations.

What is new?

Construction systems and processes that have been used for many years – decades even – will not count as 'new'. Brick and block construction or JCT Traditional or design and build contracts, for example. That is not to say that they might be unsuitable for a particular project, but just that they are not new.

What is new is, of course, harder to define. The Housing Corporation has had to wrestle with this question for several years when trying to define modern methods of construction. What is modern? Does timber frame, for example, count as 'modern' when it has been the main form of housing construction used for decades in some countries, as well as having been used for a long time in this country, albeit for only a few projects up until about ten years ago?

The guidance here has to be somewhat loose. What is new is a process or construction system that has not been commonly used (mainstream) in the house building industry in the last five years. Therefore, a construction system or process that is 'new' now, may not be in the future.

Examples of construction systems

Some examples of constructive systems are set out below. This is not an exhaustive list, but these examples provide a flavour of the types of process improvements that would help meet expectations:

- use of standard dwelling layouts (NB: inappropriate use of standard house types may mean the scheme failing to meet the expectations of other questions, such as Question 1 and Question 11);
- use of modern methods of construction as defined by the Housing Corporation and English Partnerships (see Appendix for current definitions);
- use of pre-assembled parts of the dwelling such as bathrooms;
- use of standard bathroom layouts;
- future-proof ducting/wiring systems;
- provision of basements; and
- provision of innovative car parking systems.

Examples of processes

Some examples of processes are set out below. This is not an exhaustive list, but these examples provide a flavour of the types of process improvements that would help meet the expectations:

- holding regular value management sessions on the scheme;
- provider can demonstrate that they are implementing a Construction Commitments 2012 Action Plan for their programme as a whole;
- provider holds Client Charter status;
- provider has established and operates a project management method (procedures) for its programme as a whole that demonstrably follows project and programme management good practice as defined by an appropriate professional body. These might be proprietary (such as a suitably scaled version of PRINCE2) or bespoke for the provider;
- scheme is being procured in accordance with the provider's procurement strategy, which carefully evaluates a range of procurement processes and arrangements before concluding which process(es) or route(s) to follow;
- partnering with scheme main contractor;
- partnering with scheme key sub-contractors and suppliers;
- running the scheme on a management contracting or contract management basis;
- use of NEC contracts on the scheme; and
- other evidence of seeking ways in which the scheme can be delivered more efficiently.

Enhancement

This means that the scheme actually benefits from the improvements in efficiency generated from the better process or products/systems used. The improvement should be in the form of higher quality.

As noted in Question 17, architectural quality has three elements:

- usefulness;
- durability; and
- appeal.

The benefits obtained for the scheme can contribute to any of these three aspects of architectural quality, for example:

- fewer defects;
- lower predicted lifecycle costs;
- improved functionality (more useable space, pre-ducted or pre-wired dwellings);
- reduced environmental impact;
- reduced construction waste; and
- increased budget for landscaping.

How does the provider show that efficiency benefits have been recycled into the scheme, as opposed to being absorbed by the organisation as a whole? The answer to this question will be linked to the scores of the other questions that more directly address issues of quality. If the scheme is procured efficiently, but is still of poor quality, these expectations are unlikely to be satisfactorily met.

Thus, a poor quality scheme (eg one achieving 11 or less out of the other 19 questions or nine or less for rural and infill schemes) will not meet the expectations of this question. Schemes scoring at least ten or 12 respectively out of the other 19 questions and which can demonstrate efficiency improvements at project or programme level will meet these expectations.

Summary of expectations

- The scheme will score at least 11 out of the remaining 19 questions (nine for infill and rural schemes); and
- The provider can demonstrate that it is improving the efficiency of its project management, procurement and construction processes in accordance with the guidance. The improved efficiency will have demonstrable benefits, such as reduced costs allowing investment elsewhere in the scheme or an improved product.

Appendix

Modern methods of construction (MMC)

(Taken from the Housing Corporation and English Partnership's Design for Manufacture.)

A good overview of MMC is provided in the National Audit Office report: Using Modern Methods of Construction to Build Homes More Quickly and Efficiently. In summary, it includes:

Volumetric construction (also known as modular construction): involves the production of three-dimensional units (which may be whole dwellings or parts of a dwelling) in controlled factory conditions. These units are then transported to site and assembled there. Modules can be brought to site in a variety of forms ranging from a basic structure to one with all internal and external finishes and services installed, ready for assembly.

A family-sized dwelling might typically be manufactured in four modules plus roof module(s).

Panelised construction: flat panel units are produced in a factory and assembled on-site to produce a three-dimensional structure. The most common approach is to use open panels, which consist of a skeletal structure only. More complex panels – typically referred to as closed panels – involve more factory-based fabrication and may include lining materials and insulation. These may also include services, windows, doors, internal wall finishes and external cladding.

Panels can be constructed of:

- timber;
- steel; and
- SIPS (structurally insulated panels), where two external skins are fused with solid insulation to form a rigid structural panel.

Hybrid: a method also referred to as semi-volumetric that combines both the panelised and volumetric approaches. Typically, volumetric units for highly serviced areas such as kitchens and bathrooms (sometimes referred to as 'pods' – see below) are used with the remainder of the dwelling or building constructed using panels. Pods are a type of volumetric construction, but generally referred to as pods, when they are completely fitted out and finished, such as kitchens and bathrooms coming to site including sanitary ware and tiling, ready to be plumbed in.

Non-off-site MMC does not rely to such a high degree on off-site manufacture but is still classed as such because of the innovative methods of construction. It includes 'TunnelForm' or 'thin joint blocks' that fall outside the off-site categories:

- calcium silicate bricks are produced by replacing natural sand with crushed building and demolition waste of different sources. The mechanical properties of the bricks made with these wastes are comparable or in some cases even better than those of bricks with natural sand, for instance the shear strength is greater; and
- TunnelForm is a reinforced concrete system, where the concrete is poured in situ with reusable, usually steel, shutters for the creation of walls and floors.

Question 20

Do buildings or spaces outperform statutory minima, such as building regulations?

Expectation

- Compliance with design and quality standards should automatically satisfy this question.

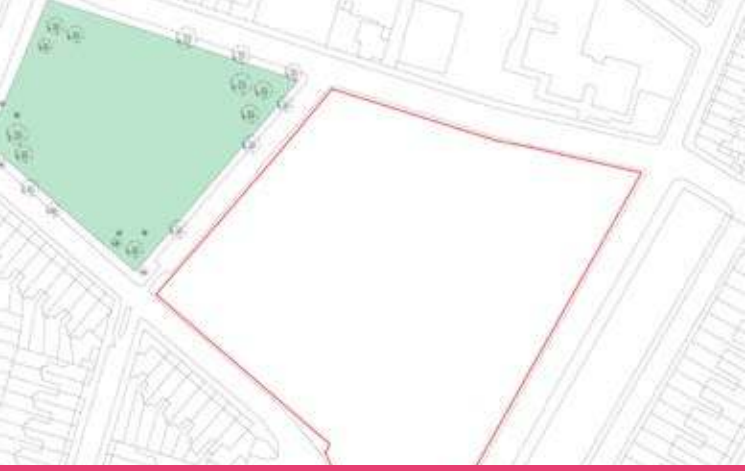


Image 1a

Image 1b

Image 2

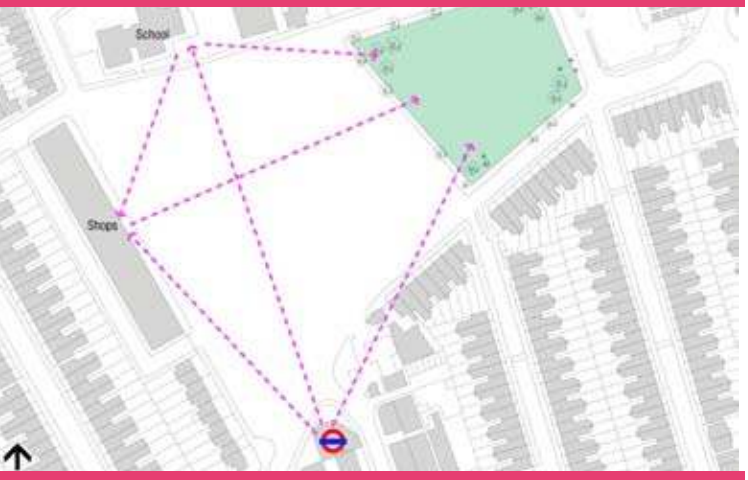


Image 2a

Appendix

Standards documents

Image 1a: Site plan

This drawing shows the development site as well as the surrounding area. It helps locate the site and shows what existing buildings and spaces the wider setting might need to be taken into account. This type of drawing is useful for Questions 7 and 14.

Image 1b: Proposed site plan

This drawing shows the proposed development within the wider context. It helps understand the general layout of the proposed development and shows how the new buildings relate to spaces and buildings next door or across the street. This type of drawing is useful for Questions 7, 9, 10, 11, 14 and 16.

Image 2: Connectivity and routes

This drawing is particularly helpful because it shows the location of things which are important for the local community, such as schools, parks, shops and public transport links and the dotted 'desire' lines between these things. These 'desire lines' show the most direct route from one to the other if there were no obstacles in the way. Building around these lines can be difficult, as it might result in a lot of triangular buildings which can be difficult to use. But this overlay shows how the layout of buildings and streets corresponds to the desire lines and helps understand how easy it will be to walk around the scheme. This type of drawing is useful for Questions 9, 10, 13 and 14.

Image 3: Site plan with amenities/facilities and transport

This drawing also shows the location of key facilities and amenities and demonstrates whether these can be reached easily on foot within five to ten minutes. The white lines show 400 m (five minutes) and 800 m (ten minutes) as the crow flies, but the purple line shows exactly how far a pedestrian would be able to walk in five minutes. Imagine setting off from home and unrolling a 400 m long ball of string. The purple line shows you how far you would get. This type of drawing is useful for Questions 1, 4, and 14.

Image 3

Image 4: Car parking and highways

This drawing shows how much of the available land is taken up with streets and car parking spaces and whether streets and car parking are dominating the scheme. It shows how car parking is distributed across the site and how the car parking spaces relate to the buildings. This type of drawing is useful for Questions 10, 11, 12, and 13.

Image 4

Image 5: Figure ground with building footprints

This drawing shows the footprints of existing and proposed buildings in black. This makes it very easy to see whether the buildings shape the spaces between them into streets, squares, mews, courtyards or other defined places. This type of drawing is useful for Questions 7, 10, 11, and 14.

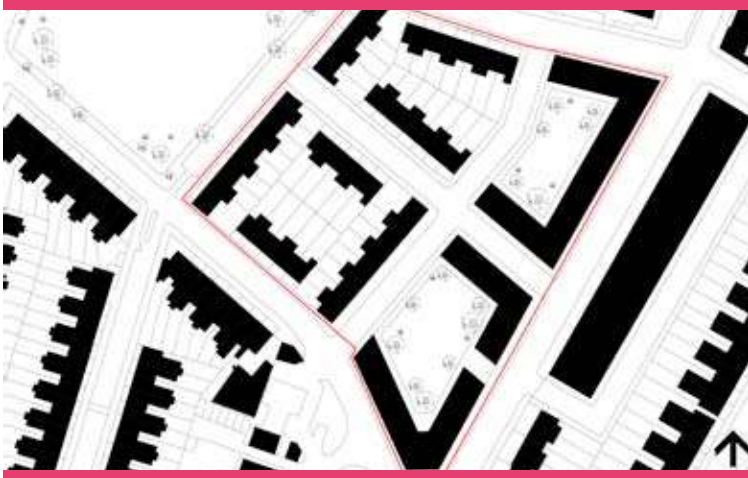


Image 5

Image 6: Public/semi-public/private green areas

This drawing focuses specifically on the green areas. It shows how many and what type of green spaces are being created. By showing which areas

Image 6

Image 7

Image 8

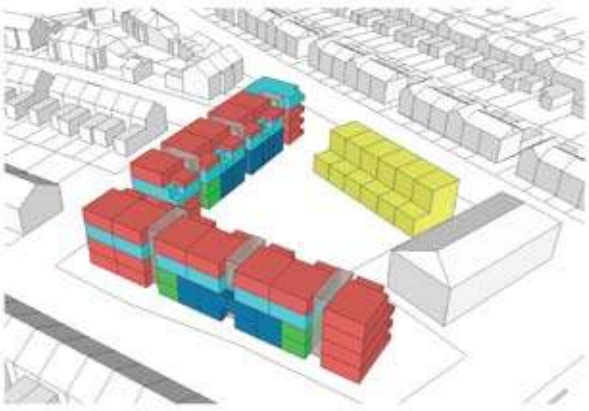


Image 9

are public, communal or private, it explains who has access to which kinds of green space. It can also help understand who has ownership and responsibility for these areas. This type of drawing is useful for Question 16.

Image 7: Dwelling types

These plans are very helpful because they show an example furnishing as well as the total floor area for each type of home. By doing so, the drawing helps evaluate whether there will be enough space to make the home for purpose and how much flexibility there might be in rearranging the furniture or adapting the home. This type of drawing is useful for Questions 17, 18, and 20.

Image 8: Overlooked spaces and entrances

This drawing shows the ‘active frontages’ of buildings by showing front doors to buildings (shown as arrows) and windows onto the street (shown as cones). In doing so, it helps evaluate whether streets and footpaths will be well overlooked and whether they will feel safe. This type of drawing is useful for Question 15.

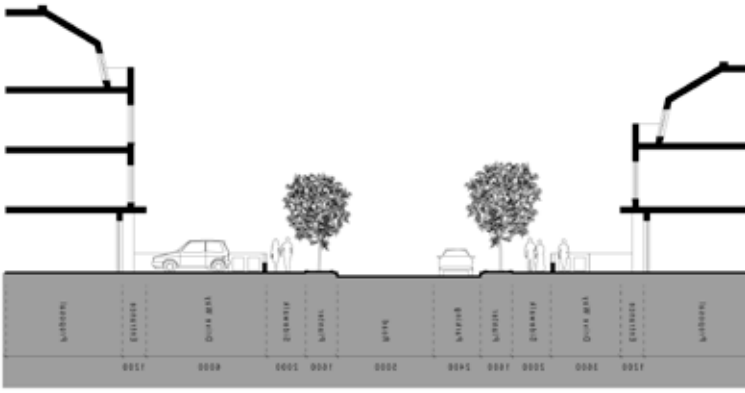


Image10

Image 9: Tenure/dwelling types

These simple drawings explain the range and number of dwelling types and tenancy types included in the scheme. They also show how these are distributed across the development. This type of drawing is useful for questions 2 and 3.

Image 10: Street sections

These section drawings help understand the different types of streets which will be created in the development. Together with the orientation of these streets, the relationship of the street's width to the height of the building and the type of planting is important in order to evaluate whether these spaces will benefit from good daylight and whether they will be susceptible to prevailing winds. The drawings also show moving traffic, parked cars, pedestrians and planting in order to help evaluate how well these spaces will work for pedestrians, cycles and cars. This type of drawing is very useful for Questions 8, 12, 13, 15 and 16.

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Achieving Building for Life

This publication offers guidance for affordable housing providers on how to achieve the Building for Life standards. In 2007, the Housing Corporation adopted the Building for Life criteria as part of its Design and Quality Standards. This guide aims to help affordable housing providers better understand the terminology, concepts and processes that are involved in meeting the standards' criteria.

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