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Better Design for South Derbyshire

South Derbyshire District Council

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1) Introduction

This design guidance provides advice to everyone involved in development in the the District of South Derbyshire.

The aim of this guidance is to provide concise and robust advice on the steps that need to be taken in order to achieve high quality design solutions. There are three key objectives:

1) **To encourage a set design process – making sure that development sites are fully assessed and understood** *before* **any design solutions are considered;**

2) **For residential developments of 10 dwellings and above - to state that the Building for Life criteria will be used as a tool in pre-application discussions and in assessing proposals submitted for planning consent.**

3) **To recommend further design guidance and policy that we expect to be followed in addition to this guidance.**

High quality design plays a central role in *'Making South Derbyshire a better place to live, work and visit'* and this forms the overall vision for the Council (Corporate Plan 2009 – 2014).

Design also plays a key role in national, regional and local planning policy documents and reference is made to these in the fourth part of this guidance.

"Making South Derbyshire a better place to live, work and visit"

(South Derbyshire District Council Corporate Plan 2009 –2014)

"Good design is indivisible from good planning"

(Para 33 of Planning Policy Statement 1 (PPS1), Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), 2005)

2) Design Process

> *"The development process, and the players within that process…have become entangled in a system which produces developments, but not 'places'"*
>
> (Llewelyn Davies, 2000, The Urban Design Compendium, p12)

It is true to say that *"context-less design leads to 'anywhere places'"* (Llewelyn Davies, 2000, The Urban Design Compendium, p19). In many cases, the situation is even worse, these 'anywhere places' are totally disconnected from everything around them – making them 'nowhere places'.

South Derbyshire District Council is asking for a simple and logical design process to be followed in order to raise the design quality of new developments. The key principle behind this design process is to ensure that development sites are fully assessed and understood before any detailed design solutions are considered.

This design process has originated from the government circular, *Guidance on changes to the development control system* (August 2006), which states that *'applicants should follow a design process'* and should *'avoid working retrospectively, trying to justify a pre-determined design through subsequent site assessment and evaluation.'* (paragraph 97, p16). Part 4 of this document highlights other legislation and policies on good design and place making.

Design and Access Statements (if required) should clearly illustrate this design process.

Before you start the design process illustrated overleaf, it is important to ensure that the appropriate skills are available and that everyone involved has a positive attitude towards quality design – the right mindset. These essential pre-requisites are summarised below:

Starting point

1) **Skills - Establishing a development team with adequate design skills.** The Council will seek to strongly encourage developers to engage appropriate professional expertise – either in-house or procured externally. The urban design professional should ideally be a Recognised Practitioner in Urban Design (accredited by the Urban Design Group), or have specific urban design skills. The Council has invested in a Design Excellence Officer.

2) **Mindset - A commitment to good design and place making.** It is also essential to fully understand the value that good design offers, and equally the cost of poor design.

Pre-application discussions

Applicants are strongly encouraged to engage in pre-application discussions **before and during** the design process (as advised in PPS 1, paragraph 12).

The Design Process

Stage 1: Assessment

This involves undertaking a thorough assessment of the site and its surroundings.

This vital first stage is often undertaken *after* a design solution has been reached, or sometimes completely missed out. In most cases, site assessments are of an unacceptably low standard and overlook key considerations.

South Derbyshire District Council would like to see a great improvement in the standard of site and contextual analysis and will expect this to be undertaken at the start of the design process.

The level of detail and depth of investigation should be related to the scale of proposed development in relation to its setting. In addition to assessing the physical characteristics of the site, applicants should also assess the social, economic and planning policy context.

Further guidance on how to undertake and illustrate a quality site assessment and how to understand local distinctiveness can be found in **Appendices A and B.**

Stage 2: Involvement

Involvement is often misunderstood. It can be interpreted as telling people what you are going to do. This is not the case. **Involvement in the design process means asking people what you should do.**

When appropriate, the Council strongly encourages applicants to engage with the relevant professionals and the wider community in order to establish their aspirations and capture their knowledge of the site. The key objective is to ensure that new development contributes positively to the community.

Further guidance and information can be found in the Council's Statement of Community Involvement (2006). The section entitled: 'Involving people in planning applications' (p14) is particularly important. Major developments will require a statement of consultation to be submitted.

Key references - South Derbyshire District Council, Statement of Community Involvement (2006)
                    - Chapter 4 of PLACEmaking, RUDI, 2009
                    - Communities in Control: Real People, Real Power (CLG 2008)

Stage 3: Vision

When stages 1 and 2 have been completed, the information gathered should be used to create a vision for the proposed development.   For example, what kind of place is it going to be?

When appropriate, a series of aims and objectives should explain how the vision is going to be achieved.

Stage 4: Options, Options, Options

A series of conceptual options should be drafted out. Three is a good minimum number of options to create. It allows the designer to explore a wider range of possibilities for the site.

The options should be assessed against the overall vision for the scheme and its aims and objectives. Any issues and challenges identified during this stage should be resolved. It is possible that the best solution is a combination of options.

Stage 5: Design

Only once stages 1-4 have been completed can a credible detailed design be produced. It is important that the vision for the scheme is not lost or diluted.

South Derbyshire District Council cannot undertake meaningful discussions about detailed designs that have not been fully researched.

3) Building for Life

Introduction

This section relates specifically to new build residential developments of 10 dwellings and above. The guidance within the other parts of this document is still relevant to such developments and should be followed.

Building for Life is a national standard for well-designed homes and neighbourhoods. The 20 Building for Life criteria are founded on government policy and best practice guidance and are used to evaluate the quality of schemes at both pre-planning and post-construction phases.

The 20 criteria are listed in Appendix C. It is important to fully understand each of the 20 criteria and more detailed information can be found on the Building for Life website (www.buildingforlife.org).

Our Stance on Building for Life

South Derbyshire District Council has formally adopted the Building for Life standard and has an accredited assessor.

The Core Strategy, due for completion in September 2011, will cement the Corporate Plan target below within South Derbyshire's Local Development Framework - Stating that the Building for Life criteria will be used as a basis for stepping-up design quality.

> *"Adopting 'Building for Life' criteria standard for new homes as a basis for negotiation with developers"*
>
> (South Derbyshire District Council Corporate Plan 2009 –2014)

This means that the Council will use the Building for Life criteria as a tool in pre-application discussions and in assessing proposals submitted for planning consent.

Where schemes are determined by the Development Control Committee, the recommendations of the Council's Design Excellence Officer will include reference to the anticipated performance of a scheme in relation to Building for Life standards.

In circumstances where it may not be possible to assess a scheme by use of all of the 20 criteria (outline application stage, pre-application discussions for example), the Council will

be looking for schemes that are **well thought out and researched, in the spirit of good design and place making and that possess overall coherence**. Consideration will be given to the potential score that could be achieved and if the scheme is heading in the right direction.

Our stance on the scoring system

As outlined in part 4 of this document, South Derbyshire District Council has a statutory duty to have regard to achieving good design (Planning Act 2008) and to only grant planning permission to developments that are considered to constitute good design (PPS1).

Schemes that meet 14 out of 20 Building for Life criteria are considered 'good'. The Council therefore considers that schemes that meet 14 of the 20 Building for Life criteria are consistent with the aspirations for achieving good design within the Planning Act 2008 and PPS1.

It is recommended that applicants aim to secure a 'comfortable' good score of at least 15 or 16 to allow for moderation once the scheme has been formally assessed by South Derbyshire District Council's accredited Building for Life assessor.

The government department, Communities and Local Government (CLG), has given local authorities further incentive to ensure housing schemes achieve a 'good' or 'very good' score by requesting Building for Life assessments are submitted as part of their Annual Monitoring Report (H6: Housing Quality).
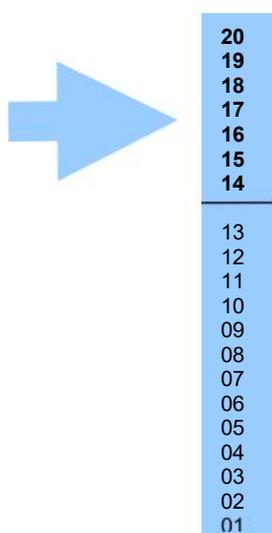
20 19 18 17 16 15 14	**Building for Life** assessments are scored as follows:
13 12 11 10 09 08 07 06 05 04 03 02 01	**Very good** (Gold) 16 / 20 or higher **Good** (Silver) 14 / 20 or 15 / 20 **Average** 10 / 20, 11 / 20, 12 / 20 or 13 / 20 **Poor** 9 / 20 or fewer

The District Council has signed up to an award scheme for house builders that will enable potential purchasers to see whether the development will provide an ideal place to live. The scheme known as 'ourplace' is based upon the principles of Building For Life. The 'ourplace' certificate is issued on the basis of information provided with the planning application and enables potential purchasers to compare online via the website www.findourplace.com (to be launched in early 2010) the scores for different housing developments. It is in effect a provisional Building For Life assessment made available at the start of the development process as the actual Building for Life award can only be issued on completion of the development having established that the development has in fact delivered what it said it would.

New development on Station Road, Melbourne, South Derbyshire, January 2010

Design and Access Statements

Design and Access Statements should demonstrate that the design process has been followed (as advised in part 2 of this document). By following this design process, a number of the Building for Life criteria may already have been achieved. This emphasises the importance of undertaking a thorough site and contextual analysis.

As South Derbyshire District Council has formally adopted the Building for Life standard, **it is expected that Design and Access Statements demonstrate which Building for Life criteria have been achieved and which have not.**

Evidence is essential

Building for Life is an evidence based assessment. If no evidence is provided for a particular criterion, a score of 0 will be awarded.

An online step-by-step guide to help housing designers and developers to produce well evidenced proposals and achieve a higher Building for Life score is available from CABE (*Evaluating Housing Proposals Step by Step*, CABE, 2008).

Key references: www.buildingforlife.org

Evaluating Housing Proposals Step by Step, CABE (2008) (on above website)

4) Planning Law, Policy and Best Practice

The planning system considers design and sustainability to be of great importance.

It is expected that all the relevant planning law, policy and guidance documents are followed when engaging in the development process.

Planning Act 2008

Local Planning Authorities now have a **statutory duty** to: *"have regard to the desirability of achieving good design for the purposes of sustainable development"* (Planning Act 2008).

South Derbyshire District Council will insist on good design where it is appropriate (which is nearly everywhere).

> *"have regard to the desirability of achieving good design for the purposes of sustainable development"*
>
> Planning Act 2008, Chapter 29, Paragraph 183

National planning policies and guidance

The basic guide to the operation of the planning system (Planning Policy Statement 1: Delivering Sustainable Development [PPS1]) states that good design is a key element in achieving sustainable development and making places better for people.

PPS1 advises that Local Planning Authorities should not accept poor design:

> *"Design which fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area should not be accepted"*
>
> (Planning Policy Statement 1: Delivering Sustainable Development, ODPM, 2005 Key Principle (iv), p6)

There are many national policy and guidance documents that encourage good design – one principle that unites all of these is **'place making'**.

In 2009, the Government published **World Class Places: The Government's Strategy for Improving Quality of Place.** This defined quality of place as:

> "the physical characteristics of a community – the way in which it is planned, designed, developed and maintained – that affect the quality of life of people living and working in it, and those visiting it, both now and into the future".
>
> World Class Places (DCMS/CLG 2009, p11)

The four elements of quality of place are:

- The range and mix of homes, services and amenities;
- Design and upkeep of buildings and spaces;
- Provision of green space and green infrastructure;
- Treatment of historic buildings and places.

Quality of place is important because the four elements above can bring **economic, social and environmental benefits** - helping to create 'attractive and vibrant localities that have a strong sense of identity and community cohesion and encourage people to walk, cycle and spend time outdoors' (World Class Places (DCMS/CLG 2009, p18).

World Class Places very successfully brings together the Government policies that promote better design and quality of place (providing a policy summary on page 27). There is also a useful CABE guide that summarises design related policies: *Design at a glance: A quick reference wall chart guide to national design policy* (see references).

The World Class Places strategy is reflected strongly in South Derbyshire District Council's Corporate Plan and key vision of **'making South Derbyshire a better place to live, work and visit'.**

South Derbyshire District Council strongly encourage all development proposals to fully engage in the spirit of good design and place making.

The publications below are considered to be some of the key texts in relation to good design and place making:

- Planning Policy Statement 1 (PPS1): delivering sustainable development (ODPM 2005);

- Planning Policy Statement 3 (PPS3): Housing (DCLG, 2006);

- World Class Places: The Government's Strategy for Improving Quality of Place (DCMS/CLG 2009);

- *By design: urban design in the planning system – towards better practice* (DETR, 2000) (companion guide to PPS1);

- *Manual for Streets* (DfT/DCLG, 2007);

- *Urban Design Compendium 1* and *Urban Design Compendium 2* (English Partnerships, 2001 and 2007);

- *Code for Sustainable Homes - a new national standard for sustainable design and construction of new homes* (DCLG, 2006) and subsequent documents (see references).

- Lifetime Homes, Lifetime Neighbourhoods: A National Strategy for Housing in an Ageing Society (CLG, 2008);

- Safer Places: the planning system and crime prevention (ODPM and Home Office, 2004).

Regional and local guidance

The Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) for the East Midlands (2009) produced by the East Midlands Regional Assembly (EMRA) has a specific chapter on design. This guidance states that *'it is essential that all new developments in the East Midlands aspire to the highest standards of design and construction'* (paragraph 1.4.1, p17). Policy 2: Promoting Better Design (p19) relates specifically to design and sustainability.

In addition to the RSS, other regionally important design considerations include:

- The National Forest – A Guide for Developers and Planners (3rd edition 2005);
- The Regional Design Review Panel (OPUN) linked to CABE (part of Regeneration East Midlands);
- Sustainable Construction and Design Guide (EMRA, 2006)
- Town and Village Design Statements
- Historic landscape characterisations
- By Design guides for Sustainable Communities published by the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) (available on their website – see references section)

The local policy, strategy and guidance documents (some adopted, some forthcoming) that relate to design are:

- SDDC Corporate Plan 2009 –2014 (adopted);
- Conservation Area Character Statement for each of the 22 Conservation Areas (forthcoming);
- Design Guidance (forthcoming).
- Leaflets on Article 4 Directions;
- Historic South Derbyshire (1991);
- Swadlincote Town Centre: A Vision and Strategy – five years on. An update and monitoring report (2005) (advisory guidance);
- Extending your Home SPG (2004);
- Housing Design and Layout SPG (2004);
- Industrial and Office Design and Layout SPG (2004);

The above documents aim to ensure that the historic environment is preserved and enhanced (by recording and observing special character) and that new development is as well designed as possible (by offering design guidance).

South Derbyshire's Local Development Framework documents are currently in the process of being produced. It is intended that the Core Strategy, due for completion in September 2011, will broadly cover the issues of design and place making and state that the Building for Life criteria will be used as a basis for stepping-up design quality.

OPUN Design Review

The East Midlands Design Review Panel supports the delivery of sustainable, high quality and well planned buildings and places by providing independent and impartial advice on design. South Derbyshire District Council will encourage larger and or sensitive schemes to be considered by the East Midlands Design Review Panel (OPUN). Information on the design review process can be found on the CABE website (www.cabe.org.uk).

Other references and resources

In addition to planning policy guidance and the key national guidance documents above, there are also many other design guidance documents and best practice reports. These reports also provide vital design advice.

These publications and internet links are referenced at the end of this document and are listed alphabetically by document title in most cases.

Further Reading

Building for Life, CABE – www.buildingforlife.org

Building in Context - New Development in Historic Areas, C.A.B.E./English Heritage (2002)

By design: urban design in the planning system – towards better practice (DETR, 2000) (companion guide to PPS1);

Car parking: What works where (English Partnerships, 2006)

Chapman and Larkham (1994) from Carmona, M. et al, **Public Places, Urban Spaces** (2003), p 244.

Circular 01/06 Guidance on Changes to the Development Control System (Communities and Local Government, 2006)

Code for Sustainable Homes - a new national standard for sustainable design and construction of new homes (DCLG, 2006) and subsequent documents (see references).

Communities in Control: Real People, Real Power (CLG 2008)

Creating thriving communities, Homes and Communities Agency, 2009

Design at a glance: A quick reference wall chart guide to national design policy (CABE, 2006).

Evaluating Housing Proposals Step by Step, CABE (2008) (www.buildingforlife.org)

Extending your Home, Supplementary Planning Guidance, South Derbyshire District Council (2004),

Graphics for Urban Design, Meeda et al - for the Urban Design Group, Thomas Telford Publishing, 2007.

Historic South Derbyshire: Design Advice, Supplementary Planning Guidance (1991), South Derbyshire District Council

Housing Design and Layout, Supplementary Planning Guidance, South Derbyshire District Council (2004)

Industrial and Office Design and Layout, Supplementary Planning Guidance, South Derbyshire District Council (2004)

Lifetime Homes, Lifetime Neighbourhoods: A National Strategy for Housing in an Ageing Society (CLG, 2008);

Manual for Streets (DfT/DCLG, 2007);

The National Forest – A Guide for Developers and Planners (3rd edition 2005), National Forest Company

The National Forest Strategy (2004-14), National Forest Company (2004)

PLACEmaking: A synthesis of professional practice and case studies about better living environments, RUDI (2009),

Planning Policy Statement 1 (PPS1): delivering sustainable development (ODPM 2005);

Planning Policy Statement 3 (PPS3): Housing (DCLG, 2006);

Planning Act 2008, Chapter 29, Paragraph 183, available from Office of Public Sector Information (OPSI) (www.opsi.gov.uk)

Safer places – the planning system and crime prevention (ODPM/Home Office, 2004)

South Derbyshire District Council Corporate Plan 2009-2014, South Derbyshire District Council (2009)

Statement of Community Involvement (2006), South Derbyshire District Council

Swadlincote Town Centre: A Vision and Strategy – five years on. An update and monitoring report (2005) (advisory guidance), South Derbyshire District Council

Urban Design Compendium (Llewelyn Davies / English Partnerships / Housing Corporation, 2001);

Urban Design Compendium 2 (Llewelyn Davies / English Partnerships, 2007);

World Class Places: The Government's Strategy for Improving Quality of Place (DCMS/CLG 2009);

Useful websites

- Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) – the government's advisor on architecture, urban design and public space - www.cabe.org.uk
- CABE space - http://www.cabe.org.uk/public-space
- Landscape institute - http://landscapeinstitute.org
- Communities and Local Government – www.communities.gov.uk
- Resource for Urban Design Information (RUDI) – www.rudi.net
- Urban Design Alliance (UDAL) – www.udal.org.uk
- Urban Design Group (UDG) – www.udg.org.uk
- Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA)– www.architecture.com
- Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) – www.rtpi.org.uk
- Homes and Communities Agency – The national housing and regeneration agency – www.homesandcommunities.co.uk
- Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) – www.tcpa.org.uk

Appendix A: Checklist for site-specific appraisals

a) Record the general impressions of the site:

For example, existing sense of place; use notes, sketches, plans, photographs to record information including legibility.

b) Record site's physical characteristics:

For example, site dimensions/area, features, boundaries, slopes, ground conditions, drainage, water resources, trees and vegetation, ecology, buildings and other features.

c) Examine relationship between site and surroundings:

For example, land uses, roads and footpaths, public transport nodes and routes, local facilities and services and other infrastructure.

d) Consider environmental factors affecting the site:

For example, orientation, sunlight/daylight, climate, microclimate, prevailing winds, shade/shelter, exposure, pollution, noise, fumes, smells.

e) Assess visual and spatial characteristics:

For example, views, vistas, panoramas, attractive features or buildings, eyesores, quality of townscape and surrounding space, landmarks, edges, nodes, gateways and spatial sequences.

f) Observe human behaviour:
For example, desire lines, general atmosphere, gathering places and activity centres.

g) Consider area's background and history:

For example, local and regional materials, traditions, styles, details, prevailing architectural and urban design context, urban grain and archaeological significance.

h) Assess existing mix of uses:

For example, variety, on site, around site, contribution to vitality.

i) Research statutory and legal constraints:

For example, ownerships, rights of way, planning status, planning conditions, covenants, statutory undertaker's services.

j) SWOT analysis

SWOT: Strengths, Weaknesses¸ Opportunities and Threats.

k) Note any danger signals:

For example, incompatible activities or adjacent uses, sense of security.

Source: Chapman and Larkham (1994) from Carmona, M. et al, *'Public Places, Urban Spaces'* (2003), pp. 244.

For guidance on how to illustrate the above, please see:

Graphics for Urban Design, Meeda et al - for the Urban Design Group, Thomas Telford Publishing, 2007.

Evaluating Housing Proposals Step by Step, CABE (2008)

Appendix B: Understanding Local Distinctiveness

When considering how local distinctiveness can be developed and/or enhanced, it is useful to consider what contributes towards eroding local distinctiveness. Developing an understanding of what erodes local distinctiveness in turn develops an appreciation of what contributes to and builds local distinctiveness.

What contributes to eroding local distinctiveness?

- Inappropriate boundary treatments and landscaping,
- Failing to capitalise on opportunities to frame views and vista to, from and within a development;
- Failing to consider the principles of inclusive design from the outset and including these as integral design features, resulting in 'after-thought' retro-fit measures;
- Demolition of buildings (including those non-listed) suitable for conversion;
- Designing for the car, placing this ahead of pedestrians, cyclists and quality street environments;
- Standardised and poorly located street furniture;
- Failing to respect established and positive plot sizes;
- Ignoring established building lines;
- Utilising non-local vernacular materials;
- Using poor design in the locality as an excuse for further poor design – instead of using development as an opportunity to introduce developments with positive urban design and character qualities;
- Scale, massing

Please note that this list is not exhaustive

Appendix C: The 20 Building for Life criteria

Environment and community

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

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

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

04. Does the development have easy access to public transport?

05. Does the development have any features that reduce its environmental impact?

Character

06. Is the design specific to the scheme?

07. Does the scheme exploit existing buildings, landscape or topography?

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

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

10. Are streets defined by a well-structured building layout?

Streets, parking and pedestrianisation

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

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

13. Are the streets pedestrian, cycle and vehicle friendly?

14. Does the scheme integrate with existing streets, paths and surrounding development?

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

Design and construction

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

17. Do the buildings exhibit architectural quality?

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

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

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