

4. DEVELOPMENT IN RESIDENTIAL AREAS

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose and Scope of the Policy Statement

1.1.1 This policy statement provides a comprehensive base of policies for controlling new development in the established residential areas of Dacorum's towns: Hemel Hempstead, Berkhamsted (including the urban area of Northchurch) and Tring. The policies complement and amplify the provisions of Part 3 of the Local Plan relating to development in residential areas. They are to be regarded as supplementary planning guidance.

1.2 The Approach Used

1.2.1 The policies are founded on the need to assess and consider the impact of development proposals upon the specific character of the area in which they are to be set.

1.2.2 The area policy approach used is based on the concept of identifying *Design Areas* within settlements, as developed by Tony Hall in his *Generation of Objectives for Design Control* (1990) and *Design Control: Towards a New Approach* (1996). Accordingly, the residential areas of the Borough's towns have been divided into a series of *Character Areas*. For each Character Area appropriate design objectives and control policies have been defined:

- Each Character Area contains a policy approach as to whether changes to all or parts of its character may be acceptable;
- An appraisal of development potential has identified the suitability of all areas for accommodating new development: areas are graded into four categories of development 'opportunity'; and
- Policies within each Character Area give a detailed level of control over the extent, layout and appearance of new development.

1.3 Evolution of the Policies and Background Documents

1.3.1 The area policies have arisen from a detailed investigation of the features, structure and character of residential areas in Hemel Hempstead, Berkhamsted and Tring. The initial proposals from this exercise, the *Residential Areas Character Study Discussion Draft*, were published in January 1995 (Dacorum Borough Council, 1995). This document contains details on the background to the Study, how it was carried out and initial proposals for separate areas and policies.

- 1.3.2 Consultation with the general public and representative organisations on the Discussion Draft was carried out in June and July of 1996. Details can be found in the *Residential Areas Character Study Public Consultation Report*. This contains the views expressed in the consultation and was approved by the Council's Policy Committee on 23 September 1997.
- 1.3.3 The Council adopted this policy approach as supplementary planning guidance to the Dacorum Borough Local Plan at full Council on 25 February 1998. The document *Supplementary Planning Guidance on Development in Residential Areas* was first published in March 1998.
- 1.3.4 This document was included within the main body of the Local Plan Deposit Draft (October 1998) though it is now removed as a result of the Inspectors Report. It remains therefore as supplementary planning guidance.

2. USING THE POLICY STATEMENT

2.1 Character Area Appraisals and Policies

- 2.1.1 The Character Areas form the basis of the policy statement. Definition of the areas is based on common urban design and neighbourhood features and qualities. Each area has a distinct policy approach. The character appraisal and policy statement for each area therefore go hand in hand.
- 2.1.2 Throughout the Borough's three towns, the quality of the built environment is generally high. Land in residential areas is not generally under- or ineffectively used. There are very few examples of derelict housing. There are also relatively few existing residential developments which can be regarded as very harmful to the appearance or character of an area. However in recent years problems have arisen with infill and plot amalgamation schemes which can influence character significantly. Most housing is nevertheless effectively used and well maintained. Residential layouts on the whole are now well established, and in most areas provide the main determinant to area character. Buildings are mainly small in scale and in general do not exceed three storeys in height.
- 2.1.3 Given this background and despite high development pressure, opportunities for new development in established areas are not considered great. Each area policy statement provides an indication of likely development opportunities through one of four classifications:
- Area of Minimal Change;
 - Area of Very Limited Opportunity;

- Area of Limited Opportunity, and
- Opportunity Area.

These classifications as they apply to the Character Areas are shown on the key maps for Hemel Hempstead, Berkhamsted and Tring near the front of sections 3, 4 and 5 of this Policy Statement respectively.

- 2.1.4 Even in the 'Opportunity Areas' the scope for new development is not particularly high. This term used does not imply total development freedom. The aim is to direct and control the form of new building and alterations whilst allowing appropriate opportunities.
- 2.1.5 Because of generally good environmental standards throughout, the policy approach in most Character Areas is to maintain their defined character. In some areas where changes are proposed, this is often to permit specific forms of change whilst retaining the basic structure of the area and certain elements of its character. The policies accord with the contemporary philosophy of maintaining existing layouts which are locally appreciated and work well, as opposed to the more drastic approach to urban planning in the 1950s and 1960s which supported the extensive clearance of areas and comprehensive redevelopment.
- 2.1.6 Criticism may be levelled at the detailed design of individual buildings across the residential areas. Designs are often bland and uninteresting or offer poor architectural proportions and lack specific design features. Similarly, works to individual buildings in terms of extensions, alterations and many other works (often falling outside the scope of planning control) sometimes bear little relation to the style of the parent building. Use is often made of fitments such as replacement windows and doors which are of standardised modern or mock-historic designs, and do not harmonise with area character. These problems are not exclusive to Dacorum, and are common across the country.
- 2.1.7 It is not the purpose of this policy statement to attempt to introduce very detailed and prescriptive control over the design of buildings. However, as well as dealing with broad principles, the area policy statements may seek to encourage good detailed design which harmonises with other styles where this is a strong and attractive feature of area character.
- 2.1.8 The existence of legal covenants – whereby a landowner or estate manager can exercise future control over a specified change – does not alter this policy statement. The statement sets out the principles through which planning permission may be given for a new residential development. It is however noted that what can be implemented could be affected by the existence of covenants, such

as at the Longdean Park estate (Hemel Hempstead Character Area 25) which 'prohibits' infilling and conversion of dwellings into smaller units.

2.2 Relationship to Other Plan Policies

- 2.2.1 The area policies provide an amplification of those in the Local Plan which govern design and layout issues in residential areas (see Policy 9 - Quality of Development, Policy 21 - Density of Residential Development and Appendix 3: Layout and Design of Residential Areas).
- 2.2.2 Specifically, the policies work within the urban structure defined in Policy 9. The land use divisions of the plan in this policy are not overridden by this policy statement. Accordingly, acceptable uses within the Character Areas are governed by the terms of Policy 9. For example, the inclusion of an area of open land within a Character Area does not convey any policy presumption in favour of residential or other development on that land.
- 2.2.3 The area policy statements cover all forms of development within the Character Areas, and not just residential proposals.

Three specific aspects of the Plan need careful consideration in relation to the new area character approach:

- Policy 19 which includes the conversion of dwellings into flats
- Policy 21 on Density of Residential Development, and
- Appendix 3 on the Layout and Design of Residential Areas.

2.3 Policy 19: Conversions

- 2.3.1 Policy 19 sets a criteria-based approach for considering the conversion of dwellings to flats in towns and large villages. The area policy statements focus the thrust of Policy 19 by identifying the areas where conversions may or may not be appropriate. The criteria set out in Policy 19 should be followed in each case, with the area policy statement providing an indication as to whether conversions are generally acceptable in relation to specific area character.

2.4 Policy 21: Density of Residential Development

- 2.4.1 Policy 21 sets sets the general density requirements for residential development in accordance with the principles in PPG3: Housing. To make the most efficient use of land available, densities will generally be expected to be in the range of 30 to 50 dwellings per hectare net. The Development Principles aim to meet this target while maintaining the general existing character of the area. Areas where the higher or lower end of the density range is acceptable will

be identified and where it is appropriate for the density of a development to be compatible with the existing character.

- 2.4.2 Higher densities can be achieved by adopting the general principles of PPG3: Housing. These Guidelines are based on scale and positioning of buildings which may lead to a similar character or an area of more significant change. By encouraging a mix of housing types and increasing densities in areas accessible by good passenger transport the number of car parking spaces required may be reduced. Imaginative layouts of a high standard of design can also have an influence on the density of residential areas.

2.5 Appendix 3: Layout and Design of Residential Areas

- 2.5.1 Layout and Design of Residential Areas aims to promote good general design practice and set out some specific minimum standards. Because they are generalised in form they may not be entirely appropriate across all Character Areas if they are applied rigidly. The area policy statements, by their nature, introduce local, character-specific considerations which develop the general guidance provided in the Plan. The following paragraphs show how Appendix 3 should operate in relation to the area policies.

- 2.5.2 The need for variety and imagination in the layout and design of housing (ref. Second introductory paragraph).

A common and major design problem is that of standardisation, 'blandness' and a general lack of imagination. Variation in design is therefore deliberately promoted in certain Character Areas. However in many areas, schemes should not be so 'imaginative' that new proposals completely deviate from the stated policy approach. Area character must be respected where required.

- 2.5.3 Terraced and courtyard forms of development have the greatest advantages in terms of sustainability (ref. fourth introductory paragraph).

Preference for these types of development will not always be appropriate, and will depend on area character. The area policy statements make it clear what the most appropriate forms of development are.

- 2.5.4 This general advice, included in the two paragraphs above, is more applicable to larger developments which can create their own internal character. The following paragraphs address more detailed aspects which apply more commonly to all residential development proposals.

- 2.5.5 Privacy (ref. point (i)).

Satisfactory levels of privacy between dwellings should be maintained and protected, but the design of development used to

achieve this should be sympathetic to the aim of maintaining and improving area character.

2.5.6 Gardens and Amenity Space (ref. point (ii)).

The minimum rear garden depth of 11.5m should normally be applied. In Character Areas where infill developments are acceptable, rear garden depths may be reduced if the shape, size and depth is compatible with the existing adjoining properties. For Character Areas where dwelling densities are low and plot sizes are large, rear gardens may be required to be provided at depths considerably over 11.5m where this is necessary to harmonise with area character.

2.5.7 Spacing of Dwellings (ref. point. (iii)).

Acceptable spacing levels depend on those set out in the area policy statements, and should respect the character of the existing area.

2.5.8 Access and Servicing (ref. point (v)).

On private drives and accesses, construction and finishing materials appropriate to the area may differ from those specified in *Roads in Hertfordshire: A Design Guide* (Hertfordshire County Council, 1994).

2.5.9 Noise (ref. point (vi)).

In certain Character Areas typified by unenclosed front gardens or forecourts (such as Hunters Oak HCA31), noise attenuation measures which might harm the area's character through enclosure and consequent visual intrusion will not normally be supported.

2.5.10 Crime prevention through design (ref. point (vii)).

Crime prevention measures achieved through design will need to be sympathetic to the constraints imposed by area character.

2.6 **Operating the Area Policies**

2.6.1 Advice is given in the following paragraphs in applying the policies to specific proposals.

2.6.2 Character appraisals. The descriptions in the character appraisals provide a general picture of the main characteristics of each Character Area. They do not give an exact record of every detail, nor do they account for minor variations in character. Where there are clear and obvious differences between substantial parts of an area, these are stated.

- 2.6.3 The character appraisals cannot hope to record every detail of the buildings and features they contain. The need for such detail is, in any event, of questionable value given the differing extent of variation within defined areas. Any area derives its 'character' from the general impressions it conveys, rather than the individual and varied details it might feature. Some areas possess a strong character with little variation (such as TCA18, Grove Park) compared to those of a more mixed nature (such as HCA23, Adeyfield North). In each particular case, a balanced assessment of the impact of new development must be made.
- 2.6.4 Detailed variations in character within an area which are revealed by detailed site specific investigations (such as when researching information for a planning application) should be taken into account at the time of considering development proposals. For example, where an area typified by small scale two storey houses contains a street or group of bungalows, a proposal to infill a gap between the bungalows with a two storey dwelling may be unacceptable. In the wider context, however, other policies operating in that Character Area, for example to restrict the mass and bulk of new dwellings to a small scale, will be relevant and should apply.
- 2.6.5 Backland development. This is a wide ranging term which can refer to a variety of situations:
- *Plot amalgamation* may constitute backland development where a series of parts of existing residential plots to the rear of established housing (frequently rear garden areas) are amalgamated to form a development site. This form of housing may be appropriate in certain areas, as indicated in each area policy statement.
 - *Tandem development*, the positioning of usually one (but sometimes more) new houses behind an existing dwelling and sharing access arrangements is a common form of backland development, but certainly the most inefficient, problematic and unsatisfactory. The area policy statements make no reference to tandem development. It is the Council's view that this is a generally unsatisfactory form of accommodating new housing.
- 2.6.6 Piecemeal development on large sites. Where the policies indicate that substantial redevelopment is acceptable on particular sites, or where the redevelopment of certain non-residential sites is appropriate, a comprehensive approach covering the whole site is, in most cases, desirable. Piecemeal proposals, involving development of only part or a small area of a site could result in a fragmented and unsightly final scheme that may not make the best or most efficient use of urban land. Piecemeal proposals on such sites are therefore not encouraged unless it can be demonstrated

how the proposed buildings can be satisfactorily accommodated within a comprehensive scheme for the rest of the site.

- 2.6.7 Open land areas. Development on open land is governed by Policies 9 (Land Use Division in Towns and Large Villages) and 116 (Open Land in Towns and Large Villages). Certain areas of open land are incorporated into Character Areas, some of which perform important functions as key area characteristics and focal points, such as the green at Leverstock Green (HCA27 - 29). Others may be totally excluded from Character Areas where their function as breaks in the built-up area is shared between two or more Character Areas. An example is the schools and open field land at Mortimer Hill, Tring which lies between a number of different Character Areas (TCA 14-17 and 19). Irrespective of their inclusion or exclusion from Character Areas, Policies 9 and 116 above will apply to open land areas. More specifically, the provisions of the open land strategy at Policy 116 have particular relevance. This is explained in more detail in the Dacorum Borough Local Plan Background Paper, the *Open Land Strategy* (1992).
- 2.6.8 Boundaries of Character Areas. Care has been taken to define boundaries between areas where a clear change of character occurs. Boundaries are where one Character Area starts and another finishes. Consequently there should, in the majority of cases, be no reason for a 'blurring' of area character at the boundaries. The effect of formulating Character Areas is to create and maintain areas of distinct character. This aim will be harmed if development proposals are allowed on the basis of the policies operating in an adjacent area where proposal sites are located close to it. Area policies should apply with equal force at the boundaries.
- 2.6.9 Through traffic and new development. New development proposals must follow the road hierarchy set out in Policy 52. Within all Character Areas, where relevant, new development should contribute to the aims of this policy. In particular new schemes should avoid creating through routes which encourage the avoidance of the correct canalisation of traffic. These are commonly known as "rat-runs", and proposals introducing them to the road network will not be supported.
- 2.6.10 Building lines. These are the linear patterns created by rows of buildings (whether detached, semi-detached, terraced or in groups) usually fronting a highway. In certain areas building lines are very clear and a strong component of area character, such as Boxmoor, HCA7. In others, mainly (but not exclusively) in modern areas, such as Springwood in Northchurch, BCA20, building lines are non-existent due to the informal layout of dwellings. Building lines vary in consistency, and some do not constitute a rigidly straight line parallel to the highway. Rows of dwellings which are staggered or

curved, for example, can form building lines which should be followed according to the area policies as set out.

- 2.6.11 'Terracing' effect of dwelling extensions. This occurs when dwellings have extensions added which bring their flank walls very close to or directly abutting each other. Repeated extensions in this manner can transform the appearance of, for example, a street of moderately spaced detached houses into one which is tightly packed, giving the appearance of terraced houses. The effect of terracing can be controlled through the implementation of the *spacing* requirements of an area's policy statement. These set out a range of widths that should be maintained between the flank walls of dwellings. They apply to extensions as well as new residential units. The *spacing* requirements will not apply to single-storey extensions, as the visual effects of terracing arises mainly from extensions above first floor level.
- 2.6.12 Conservation Areas are not included within the defined residential Character Areas. Refer to Policies 120 (Development in Conservation Areas) and 121 (The Management of Conservation Areas) and the Berkhamsted Town Centre Strategy.

2.7 Terminology

- 2.7.1 The following provides a glossary of terms used in the character appraisals and policy statements of each Character Area.
- 2.7.2 *Amenity spaces and greens* are small areas of open undeveloped land within residential areas which may be space for landscaping, grassed verges or areas, or play space but do not qualify as larger areas of structural *open land* defined in Policies 9 and 116 of the Plan.
- 2.7.3 *Bulk and mass* describes the overall shape and in particular volume of a building. This is subjective terminology, but describing the scale of buildings in this way is an important consideration and a key factor in describing the character of an area. For example, a block of flats which is bulky in appearance could be seriously at odds with an established pattern of modestly sized semi-detached houses.
- 2.7.4 *Communal parking* is the provision made for vehicle parking in communal areas serving a number of dwellings. These work best where they are conveniently located in relation to the dwellings they serve and where a degree of public surveillance exists. Areas which cannot be seen easily or are located at an inconvenient distance from the dwellings they are supposed to serve can become unkempt and poorly used (see *Off-street parking* below). Additionally, it is important that communal areas are designed carefully to avoid unattractive expanses of hard surfacing. Variation

in material types, providing small groups of parking spaces and hard and soft landscaping can be effective ways of tackling this problem.

2.7.5 *Density* provides an indication of the frequency and extent of dwellings found on a given area of land. The descriptions given in the Character Appraisal are broad indications only and should not be interpreted as mathematical figures to be strictly followed. Statements on density ranges have been prepared from a broad assessment of typical dwelling layouts within areas, including areas of highway (whether public or not) to give a fair measure of area as opposed to solely plot density.

2.7.6 However, density ranges for new development, as outlined within the development principles, are based on net site areas to ensure the most efficient use of land. The net site area is the land to be developed for housing and directly associated uses (see Policy 21) and should be provided in the range of 30 to 50 dwellings per hectare. This should be achieved while maintaining a high standard of layout and design and the inclusion of trees, hedges and shrubs and open space is an important factor in all housing development proposals. In most incidences the minimum net density range of 30 dwellings per hectare is encouraged and should be achieved. However in established residential areas, within the low or very low density range, where the defined character of an area should be maintained, higher density development can be achieved through dwelling mix schemes. For example, an existing dwelling can either accommodate one house or four flats. The density of the area is increased while maintaining the existing character. If a development proposal falls outside the indicated density in the relevant area policy, there is no 'automatic' presumption to refuse planning permission. Numerical density is one factor to be considered and balanced against others set out in area policies.

The ranges used are:

Density Range Group	Typical Range in The Appraisal of Existing Character	Typical Development	Net Site Density Range Proposed
Very Low	Below 15 dwellings/ha	4+ bedroom detached houses at one and two storeys with large gardens	Development should be compatible with the character in a particular density range
Low	15 – 25 dwellings/ha	3 and 4 bedroom detached houses at one and two storeys with medium sized gardens	Density should be compatible with the existing character
Medium	25 – 35 dwellings/ha	2 and 3 bedroom detached, semi-detached and terraced houses at one and two storeys, with small gardens	To generally exceed 30 dwellings/ha (in the range of 30 to 35 dwellings/ha)
High	35 – 45 dwellings/ha	2 and 3 bedroom terraced houses with small gardens; 1 and 2 bedroom flats; two and three storeys	Density to be in the range of 35 to 50 dwellings/ha
Very High	Over 45 dwellings/ha	1 and 2 bedroom terraced houses with small gardens; Studio, 1 and 2 bedroom flats; two and three storeys and higher	Density may exceed 50 dwellings/ha

2.7.7 *Domestic curtilage buildings* are those which are ancillary to the main residential use of a dwelling, such as garages and sheds.

2.7.8 *Greenfield development* is the construction of dwellings or other buildings on undeveloped land. This term does not include garden land within individual residential curtilages.

2.7.9 *Groups of buildings* refers to two or more separately occupied buildings which are physically connected. This includes pairs of semi-detached houses, rows of terraced houses or cluster homes. Blocks of flats or elderly persons' homes, by contrast, are not regarded as groups of buildings, but as single buildings standing in their own right. This term has particular relevance in describing *spacing*. An area may contain many terraced houses where the actual dwellings physically abut one another, yet the spacing

between the rows of terraces (the groups of buildings) may be of a generous standard.

- 2.7.10 *Infilling* is a form of development whereby buildings, most frequently dwellings, are proposed or constructed within a gap along a clearly identifiable built-up frontage or between a group of buildings.
- 2.7.11 *Off-street parking* refers to provision made either in communal areas, private drives or garage blocks. Such parking spaces should, as far as possible, be well related to the dwellings they serve.
- 2.7.12 *Plot amalgamation* is the development of a site formed by amalgamating parts of domestic curtilages and is often a form of backland development (ref. paragraph 2.6.5 above). Most frequently this involves the assembly of a number of adjacent rear garden areas to form a development site.
- 2.7.13 *Private landscaping* refers to planting carried out within a private curtilage. Although not publicly owned, such planting is often a very important feature of area character.
- 2.7.14 *Public landscaping* is the provision of a range of planting (but most often trees and shrubs) in public and often prominent locations, such as roadside verges.
- 2.7.15 *Rear separation* is most commonly the back-to-back distance between houses, although depending upon dwelling configuration (particularly on corners of residential roads), this may be the distance from the rear of one dwelling to the side of another.
- 2.7.16 *Redevelopment* describes development involving the demolition of existing buildings.
- 2.7.17 *Scope for Residential Development* sets out the broad opportunities (or otherwise) for new housing in a Character Area. It includes a classification of development potential for the Area (see paragraphs 2.1.3 and 2.1.4 above). The four classifications used are described as follows:

Description	Typical Potential
Minimal Change	Usually areas set out on a comprehensively planned layout. Often no space for infilling and insufficient space for plot amalgamation. Redevelopment would fundamentally alter area character.
Very Limited Opportunity	Areas where only occasional gap sites may give limited infilling opportunities, or where the redevelopment of a non-residential site may come forward. Usually no plot amalgamation opportunities.
Limited Opportunity	As 'Very Limited Opportunity' but offering more gap sites, redevelopment possibilities or space for plot amalgamation.
Opportunity	This term does not imply total development freedoms. Opportunities within the framework of area policies can still be quite constrained. Often areas with large redevelopment opportunities or large residential plots where infilling or plot amalgamation can take place.

2.7.17 *Serial vision* refers to the sequence of views that appear as one moves along through space, for example by walking or travelling along a road. Where the layout of a residential area involves continual changes in road alignment, or the informal positioning of dwellings, a sequence of varied views will emerge as a person moves along the road. The perceptions to the individual may be of visual diversity and richness. Where serial vision is considered an important feature of an area, this is included in the character appraisal and policy statement. The concept was recognised by Gordon Cullen in his classic text on urban design, *The Concise Townscape* (1971).

2.7.18 *Spacing* is commonly used to describe the side-to-side separation between buildings. The ranges used are:

Spacing Range	Distances
Close	2 m or less
Medium	2 m to 5 m
Wide	5 m to 10 m
Very Wide	Over 10 m