

10. Securing Quality Design

- 10.1. The quality of the built environment and the public realm is important in shaping places and enhancing the quality of life. Good design can help create distinctive, linked places where people feel welcome and want to live, work and spend their free time.
- 10.2. Housing needs to be designed to a high standard and delivered at the optimum densities in the right locations. It also needs to deliver greater choice and affordability, limit the use of greenfield sites and respect community-led place strategies for each of the towns and large villages in the borough.
- 10.3. As the principal town, Hemel Hempstead will be the focus for growth and regeneration, including substantial improvements to the image and quality of the town's built fabric and public realm. Elsewhere, new development provides an opportunity to enhance positive features, such as the historic character of the borough, and to improve any areas marred by neglect or insensitive development in the past.
- 10.4. The Council will seek to make the best use of urban land by requiring higher densities to provide more dwellings in and around town and local centres. However, there will be locations where it will be necessary to limit densities to avoid harm to the character surrounding area and environment. Examples of such circumstances include:
- impacts on views of important buildings and spires, open land, countryside and skylines;
 - impacts on the pattern, quality and unique setting of different natural habitats as identified in the Urban Nature Conservation Study; and
 - the appearance and setting of conservation areas and listed buildings.

The Council recognises that residential gardens are not always suitable for development.

- 10.5. Residential Character Area Appraisals, covering Hemel Hempstead, Berkhamsted and Tring, were adopted by the Council in 2004. Urban Design Assessments have subsequently been carried out for Dacorum's three towns and three large villages to ensure that the design of new buildings and the public realm respects the existing unique built, natural, social and economic context. These complement the Residential Character Area Appraisal work. Conservation Area Appraisals have also been undertaken for some of the conservation areas. Further Conservation Area Appraisals are programmed, and an update of the Urban Design Assessments and Residential Character Area Appraisals will be undertaken.

Successful Urban Design

- 10.6. There is no magic formula for arranging buildings and development to create a sense of place, because the key is in the application of visions, place strategies and principles within the process. However, Figure 11 sets out 'Dacorum's Spatial Awareness Framework' to help developers accord with the vision and the place strategies for towns and large villages in the borough, the Residential Character and

Conservation Area Appraisals, and the character zones in the Urban Design Assessments. The full details for individual place visions and place strategies are set out in Sections 19-26.

Figure 11: Dacorum's Spatial Awareness Framework

Developers must consider the relationship of the proposed development with its location and physical context:

A. *The Place Strategy:*

- the size of the settlement and the number of centres; and
- the long-term place vision.

B. *The character of the settlement:*

- defined countryside borders;
- the topography;
- landscape setting and green gateways;
- historic setting and settlement pattern; and
- the key views into and out of the settlement.

C. *The character of the neighbourhood/urban design zone:*

- the character appraisal of the neighbourhood pattern;
- typical density;
- key landmarks;
- movement and pedestrian gateways; and
- key views within the settlement.

D. *The public and private realm:*

- streets, spaces and movement corridors;
- movement routes of people and wildlife;
- public space network;
- private gardens; and
- green infrastructure.

E. *The character of the site:*

- street pattern;
- style of buildings;
- building lines and orientation of buildings; and
- materials used.

10.7. Figure 12 establishes the key 'Urban Design Principles' expected to be applied by developers to enhance existing places and create successful new places in the borough. They have been informed by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment's 'By Design' principles and mutually reinforce the principles set out in the Urban Design Assessments, the Residential Character and Conservation Area Appraisals and Policies CS10-13 on design and Policies CS28-32 relating to using resources efficiently (Section 18).

Figure 12: Urban Design Principles

1. **Character** - a place with its own identity that respects the local history, geology and landscape, and the Urban Design Assessment character zones and Residential Character and Conservation Area Appraisals.
2. **Defined layout and enclosure** - a place that is defined by buildings, structures and landscape made up of public and private spaces.
3. **Making connections** - a place that is easy to get to and move around.
4. **High quality of public realm** - creating places with attractive environmental quality.
5. **Legibility** - a place that has a clear image and identity and is easy to understand.
6. **Adaptability** - a place that can respond to changing uses easily and is robust over time.
7. **Diversity** - a place that offers a mix of activities to the widest choice of users
8. **Safe and welcoming** - creating places that feel safe, secure and welcoming for everyone.

- 10.8. Dacorum's Spatial Awareness Framework and Urban Design Principles are part of a well-grounded approach, which considers the quality of urban design from the outset. With this in mind, planning applicants considering building at least one new home or commercial building will be expected to cover three design-led steps:

Figure 13: 3 Step Approach to Successful Design

1. **Be spatially aware** – refer to Dacorum's Spatial Awareness Framework identified in Figure 11.
2. **Consider design and access** – explain how the proposal meets the Urban Design Principles identified in Figure 12.
3. **Consider sustainable design and construction** – Complete a sustainability statement to explain how sustainable development will be delivered (see section on sustainable design and construction and Policies CS28 and CS29).

- 10.9. Local guidance and best practice are continually evolving, aiming to raise design standards further and ensure long-term management of the built environment and public spaces. Examples of guidance that will need to be considered include:

- Hertfordshire's Building Futures Guide - www.hertslink.org/buildingfutures; and
- Chilterns Buildings Design Guide and associated Technical Notes - www.chilternsaonb.org.

Quality of the Built Environment

- 10.10. Successful towns and villages should be designed so that they are pleasant places to live, work and visit.
- 10.11. New development will help meet the visions identified in the place strategies for the towns and large villages, and address any key issues identified for each of the places that will help to improve the quality of the built environment and respect and enhance the historic environment.
- 10.12. The layout and design of settlements includes neighbourhoods, and public and private spaces. These spaces include a variety of character areas, described as neighbourhoods in the Residential Character Area Appraisals, conservation areas in the Conservation Area Appraisals and urban design zones in the Urban Design Assessments. The Vision Diagram at the end of each place strategy (Sections 20-26) illustrates these urban design zones.
- 10.13. Within character areas, the aim of design is to improve the negative aspects of the built environment and promote the positive historic elements. Improvements to the existing street arrangement and character areas will be identified in the Urban Design Assessments and Conservation Area Appraisals. They will help to deliver a more comprehensive, intelligible and interesting approach to urban design.
- 10.14. All development will also be based on the premise of achieving sustainable development. Taking advantage of expert advice and better assessment methods, the aim will be to raise the standard of architecture, using innovative design and materials that are sympathetic to local character, whilst meeting the needs of different people and households.

POLICY CS10: Quality of Settlement Design

The design of all new development will be expected to follow the '3 Step Approach to Successful Design' (Figure 13).

At the broad settlement level, development should:

- (a) respect defined countryside borders and the landscape character surrounding the town or village;**
- (b) reinforce the topography of natural landscapes and the existing soft edges of towns and villages;**
- (c) promote higher densities in and around town centres and local centres;**
- (d) protect and enhance significant views into and out of towns and villages;**
- (e) deliver landmark buildings¹⁰ at movement and pedestrian gateways and enhance focal points with high quality architecture;**
- (f) preserve and enhance green gateways; and**
- (g) protect and enhance wildlife corridors.**

¹⁰ Landmark buildings are easily recognisable structures that aid navigation to and within an area. They are not necessarily defined by their height, but by their distinctiveness due to design and location.

POLICY CS11: Quality of Neighbourhood Design

Within settlements and neighbourhoods, development should:

- (a) respect the typical density intended in an area and enhance spaces between buildings and general character;
- (b) preserve attractive streetscapes and enhance any positive linkages between character areas;
- (c) co-ordinate streetscape design between character areas;
- (d) protect or enhance significant views within character areas;
- (e) incorporate natural surveillance to deter crime and the fear of crime; and
- (f) avoid large areas dominated by car parking.

The quality of neighbourhood design in towns and large villages will be reinforced through a Supplementary Planning Document on Urban Design.

POLICY CS12: Quality of Site Design

On each site development should:

- a) provide a safe and satisfactory means of access for all users;
- b) provide sufficient parking and sufficient space for servicing;
- c) avoid visual intrusion, loss of sunlight and daylight, loss of privacy and disturbance to the surrounding properties;
- d) retain important trees or replace them with suitable species if their loss is justified;
- e) plant trees and shrubs to help assimilate development and softly screen settlement edges;
- f) integrate with the streetscape character; and
- g) respect adjoining properties in terms of:
 - i. layout;
 - ii. security;
 - iii. site coverage;
 - iv. scale;
 - v. height;
 - vi. bulk;
 - vii. materials; and
 - viii. landscaping and amenity space.

Quality of the Public Realm

10.15 Public realm includes the network of streets, squares, spaces around and between buildings, structures and urban landscape, as well as rights of ways, parks and open spaces. These public spaces have a major part to play in improving the character, attractiveness and success of many places in the borough and enriching the quality of life of residents and visitors.

- 10.16 The public realm should be well linked, accessible, permeable and legible, lit to an appropriate level and encourage a sense of security and safety for all people. These spaces should be clearly defined from private spaces, easy to move through, put people before traffic and integrate land uses and transport. Guidance such as the Urban Design Compendium and Manual for Streets promote the 'greening' of streets and multi-modes of travel such as walking, cycling and public transport.
- 10.17 The town centres and local centres in the borough make up a key part of the public realm that is managed by the Council. These spaces are expected to accommodate a wide range of activities and their refurbishment and maintenance are essential in achieving attractive, welcoming, interesting, uncluttered, thriving and safe public spaces. As part of any refurbishment the Council will welcome any design features that can encourage an interactive public realm to encourage play and enjoyment of the space.
- 10.18 Hemel Hempstead as the largest town in the borough requires significant improvements to the public realm. These improvements should work towards meeting the vision set out for Hemel Hempstead and the vision for its town centre (see Section 20). It will also need to achieve the objectives in the Dacorum Development Programme that relate to improvements in the public realm.
- 10.19 To help realise improvements to the public realm, development will be expected to be delivered in a comprehensive manner, in conjunction with other partners, through new development schemes, transport schemes and regeneration schemes. A partnership approach will be expected for the future management of the public realm.
- 10.20 Creative design will be encouraged to inject fresh visual interest, and an interactive public realm to showcase innovative sustainable design and construction methods. Developments that are discordant with their context and fail to enhance the character, quality and function of an area will not be supported.

POLICY CS13: Quality of the Public Realm

New development will be expected to contribute to the quality of the public realm by:

- (a) providing active frontages and natural surveillance;**
- (b) promoting clutter free streets by removing unnecessary signs and utilising multi-purpose street furniture;**
- (c) promoting pedestrian friendly, shared spaces in appropriate places;**
- (d) incorporating a coherent palette of sustainable surface materials, planting and street furniture;**
- (e) including an interactive and stimulating realm with public art and appropriate lighting; and**
- (f) incorporating suitable trees, living walls and soft landscaping.**

Monitoring:

Indicator(s)	Target(s)
Sustainability statements	70% or more of all sustainability assessments should achieve the 'green' scoring level each year.

Delivery will be achieved by:

- the Development Management DPD and supporting guidance.
- the application of car parking standards;
- the Urban Design SPD which will update and supersede the Residential Character Area Appraisals;
- guidance in development briefs, master plans and other design statements;
- implementing the place strategies and Dacorum Development Programme; and
- partnership working with the local highway authority to promote a high quality public realm.

