

Stratford upon Avon: residential character

Policy considerations and management suggestions

A range of policy considerations relevant to the control of development within the type of area studied has been assembled. While not suitable in this early form (because of limitations of time with the current project) to be used as Supplementary Planning Guidance, these suggestions and the range of good practice identified could readily be developed.

Over-arching principles of good design

1. Create integrated places

In order to create integrated places, new developments must be visually integrated and physically linked with the landscape and the surrounding built environment that exists within its vicinity. This should be achieved using the right materials, building forms and landscaping for the local area. New developments in existing areas also need to respect any current and historic linkages and urban structures that may already exist.

In this context, 'local' means the surrounding area extending perhaps to a couple of hundred metres. Using precedents from the far side of the town, or further afield, should be done with great care and infrequently.

2. Create accessible places

The success of new residential developments depends on their connections with their surroundings, and how far they contribute to the quality of the locality. New developments should be easy to get to by a range of means of transport and should be physically integrated with their surroundings. Considerable attention should be given to how people will move around, emphasising pedestrians, cycling and promoting the use of public transport.

3. Create comfortable places

If new developments are to be well-used and enjoyed, they must be safe, comfortable, offer a variety of experiences and be visually attractive. They need to be distinctive, provide space for leisure and opportunities for social interaction.

4. Create flexible places

New residential developments should be designed to be flexible enough to respond to changes in population, household make-up and lifestyle.

5. Create sustainable places

New buildings and public places need to be designed for energy and resource efficiency. This should involve consideration of insulation, aspect, alternative energy, transportation, water recycling, and selection of appropriate building materials.

New development, at whatever scale, should therefore:

- provide a varied townscape that is interesting, memorable and navigable.

- provide a variety of dwelling types and sizes that will adapt to social and economic change, making provision for diverse social, cultural and physical needs.
- provide a mixture of occupancies, to assist the development of community spirit.
- complement the context of the surrounding area: infill development should aim to 'fit in' and not 'stand out from' its surroundings, except in exceptional circumstances.
- build on to the existing identity of places by using materials, colours and textures that are complimentary to those already existing. Street dimensions, building setbacks, heights, plot sizes and building coverages should reflect those already existing, in order to reinforce place identity.

General guidance for all 8 areas studied

The general advice contained in the District Council's *District Design Guidance* should be adhered to.

Many suburban locations are pleasant, low-density residential areas with mature gardens and street trees. Although they may not warrant formal designation as conservation areas, it is both reasonable and desirable to ensure that the positive physical and historical characteristics of all such areas are maintained and improved.

All new development proposals in these areas will be required explicitly to respect, maintain or enhance positive aspects of local character and distinctiveness. The existence of what are now identified as features of poor urban design in the locality will not be an acceptable reason for repeating them. Such negative aspects may not be confined to front elevations, but may include side and rear elevations, landscaping, and street and plot layouts. Development proposals compromising local environmental quality, character and distinctiveness, for example through poor or standardised designs, unduly high densities, or poor landscaping, will be resisted.

Substantial alterations to individual existing buildings and their settings will therefore also merit careful consideration. The replacement of individual buildings with high-quality individual replacements whose design is related to the local distinguishing characteristics of the area will be acceptable.

Development of 'backland' sites for housing, where such development would be detrimental to the character, traditional settlement pattern, or amenity of the location will not normally be permitted.

Issues of area context

The concept of new development contributing to the 'local distinctiveness' of its surrounding area is strongly supported by recent government guidance. The local environment often has a distinctive character, which is valued by existing residents. Thus it is important that new proposals take proper account of the street scene of which they form part. But this does not mean that identical or very similar versions of neighbouring buildings are inevitably sought; creativity and innovation are equally an important part of living, developing, places. The key principle is that creativity and innovation should clearly be informed by existing context and local distinctiveness.

Proposals, due to the scale or sensitivity of the site should be accompanied by a design statement identifying, and explaining how the proposed development relates to the particular characteristics of the local context.

- Local distinctiveness is what gives a place its character and allows people to identify with it; development should seek to reinforce positive characteristics.
- Features considered poor in terms of local character and urban design must not be used as precedents in new proposals.

Issues of density

It is recognised that current government guidance strongly recommends higher densities, of 30-50 dwellings per hectare. However, this may not be suitable for infill development in all existing built-up areas.

Densities for new developments must reflect local characteristics.

- Standard densities of 30-50 dwellings per hectare are more suitable in town and city centres and in areas well served by public transport.
- Appropriate densities for new residential development should have regard for the location of the site and densities of the surrounding neighbourhoods.
- While newer development may reasonably be expected to have a higher density, it must not have a significant adverse effect on the level of privacy of existing neighbouring properties, and should not materially affect the amount of sunlight or daylight available to such properties.

Issues of the quality of design, including contemporary designs

In existing residential areas of mixed characteristics, infill development proposals are not required to be a copy or pastiche of existing styles and developments. High-quality variety could enhance local characteristics. There is scope for new styles and materials, but where new developments display good manners towards their older neighbours.

High quality building design will be expected in all new development and will include consideration of the mass, scale, proportions, rhythm, order, unity and expression of proposed new buildings. Planning permission will not be granted for poor quality or inappropriate design. High quality modern designs, whether they are interpretations of traditional styles or not, will be encouraged where they can demonstrate that the existing surroundings have been taken into consideration.

There may be exceptional cases where new development may be allowed that are not strictly in harmony with its surroundings; for example where it provides a townscape landmark in an appropriate location. Such proposals would have to be of exceptional individual quality and be in an appropriate location.

All new buildings should include high standards of noise and thermal insulation, use materials with low environmental impacts, make provisions for recycling and conservation measures and consider sustainable drainage and alternative forms of energy.

Issues of plot sizes and proportions

Plot sizes, and in particular their widths along the street frontage, are important in determining the rhythm of buildings along a street. Plot depths, and the proportion of the plot occupied by buildings, establish characteristics of density and privacy. Particularly in the case of infill development, where there is a distinctive and valued pattern of plot widths etc, then these may have to be closely followed.

A further characteristic of many existing suburban areas is that the gaps between buildings are a critical element in the street scene, often allowing glimpses into mature planting in rear gardens. These patterns of gaps should be respected in the design of new developments.

Consideration must be given to dividing larger development sites to reflect the narrower plots normally developed in earlier periods, particularly where these are a positive local characteristic.

- Narrow plots can provide greater design variety and relate better to existing development forms in many areas.
- Narrow plots can be advantageous in avoiding bulky and awkward designs on sloping sites.

Issues of existing features

As far as possible, traces of the position or arrangement of existing features, if not necessarily their substance, should be carried forward into new development. This can assist in retaining elements of area identity and, especially, traces of the historical processes of area development.

Good quality existing buildings should always be considered for re-use rather than demolition and replacement.

- Retaining and re-using existing buildings can avoid large-scale clearances, loss of local character and the break-up of local communities.
- Many older buildings, even if 'ordinary', can be significant to local communities and have townscape merit. Demolition of sound buildings should be a result of careful thought and analysis (and there is also the sustainability issue of the embedded energy in an existing building to consider).

Issues of moving and connecting

The insertion of new developments must take the opportunity to create well-linked places and 'walkable' neighbourhoods.

- Public routes must be connected, short, direct, well-lit, overlooked by frontages and related to desire lines.
- Isolated pedestrian routes can feel intimidating and should be avoided.
- Series of culs-de-sac promote longer vehicular and pedestrian journeys and should be kept to a minimum.

- The design of streets should discourage speeding traffic.

Defining public and private spaces

There should be clear definition of the public and private realms. Building fronts should overlook public spaces; backs should face other backs and create privacy

Buildings should reinforce and define streets and follow a coherent building line, determined by surrounding development contexts.

Boundary treatments should enhance and define public space.

Statutory documents and suggestions for good practice

i) Supplementary Planning Guidance and technical documents:

Stratford-on-Avon District Council (2001) *District Design Guide*

Stratford-on-Avon District Council (2004) *Stratford-upon-Avon Waterfront Masterplan*

Stratford Town Council (2002) *Town Design Statement*

Stratford-on-Avon District Council (1998) *Riverside Environs Study*

Stratford-on-Avon District Council (1992) *Stratford-upon-Avon Conservation Area – Consultants Report*

PPS1: *Delivering Sustainable Development* (2005)

PPG3 (2001) *Housing*

PPG15 (1994) *Planning and the historic environment*

ii) Good practice:

Barton, H et al. (2003) *Shaping Neighbourhoods. A Guide for Health, Sustainability and Vitality*

DETR (1998) *Places, Streets and Movement. A companion to Design Bulletin 23*

ODPM (2001) *Better places to live by design: a companion guide to PPG3*

iii) Acknowledgement is made to ideas from the following local authority guides:

Birmingham City Council (2001) *Places for all*

Birmingham City Council (2001) *Places for living*

Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (2004) *Supplementary planning guidance: design guidance for residential areas*

Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council (2004) *Supplementary planning guidance: new housing in context*

Surrey Heath Borough Council (2002) *Residential development in settlement areas – development control guidelines*