

Local Development Framework Briefing Paper Urban Design and Public Realm



Devon County Council's advice to Local Planning Authorities.

This is one of a series of briefing papers prepared by Devon County Council to assist the preparation of Local Development Documents.

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Local Planning Authorities are requested to take the following matters into account in preparing their Local Development Frameworks and other documents:

- 1. Raise the standards of all development across the county – by delivering a higher standard of design through the preparation of detailed Master Plans, Town Codes and Design Codes to with the view to enhance the local area.***
- 2. Create excellence in urban design, building construction and the management of the public realm – by ensuring the delivery of the highest quality design in the built environment thereby creating a new heritage for future generations***
- 3. Reinforce the special quality and character of Devon - to maintain the Counties diversity and cultural uniqueness. The development of groups and organisations, such as the Devon Quality Design Initiative (DQDI), the Architecture Centre for Devon and Cornwall and Creating Excellence will assist in establishing a quality design benchmark required by all development across Devon.***
- 4. Ensure all new development assists in making communities sustainable and places where people want to live and work.***
- 5. Developing a Design Framework - applying good practice in seeking to achieve of high quality and inclusive design having regard to relevant good practice design guides and advice***

Partnership Working

Devon County Council wishes to work in partnership with District Councils, in further developing the above policy areas with colleagues and other organisations and would wish to be fully involved in any discussion relating to them.

1. Introduction

Planning Policy Statement 1: Delivering Sustainable Development (PPS1) sets out the Government's overarching policy on design matters. PPS1 is clear that good design is indivisible from good planning. It states that design which is inappropriate in its context, or which fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions, should not be accepted. Our approach reflects that of PPS1 in promoting high quality and inclusive design, in order to improve the character and quality of Devon whilst improving quality of life by creating healthy communities and neighbourhoods, fostering social cohesion and aiding urban renewal and regeneration.

The scope of this briefing paper is to bring to the attention of Local Planning Authorities the need to deliver good design through the planning system, which demonstrates a commitment to raising the standard of development across the county, helps to improve Devon's environment, and adheres to the principles of good practice to achieve high quality and inclusive design.

This briefing paper reflects the role of Devon County Council in promoting good design through the policies of the Devon Structure Plan (2001-16), the revised Devon Strategic Plan (2006-11) and the draft RSS for the South West (2006-26). Raising standards of design should not be the exclusive responsibility of any one profession but should be owned by all those involved in the development process, together with those commissioning, occupying or using the building or space. It is only through a collective aspiration to see standards raised that will result in the bar being raised.

District Councils as the local planning authorities, have a major role to play in raising standards through their development control process. This Briefing Paper sets out the need for Local Development Documents in deliver a framework to achieve this.

2. The Vision and Objectives

The Devon Structure Plan sets a Vision for the Future. Key to that Vision is the physical environment in which people live, it contributes directly to the quality of life they enjoy. This environment includes both urban and rural areas. The factors that contribute to the overall quality of life relate both to physical elements such as the landscape, open countryside and townscape and to the availability of facilities and services. The physical environment of settlements can be maintained by the conservation of their distinctive characteristics and their individual historical and cultural heritage. This makes an important contribution to the environmental and economic regeneration of Devon's towns and cities.

The quality of development, both in terms of historic buildings and new development enhances the quality of life in town and country and the feeling of 'sense of place'. High Level Policy Aim 1 reflects this priority and in planning for the future the need to ensure that this special environment is conserved and enhanced for its own intrinsic value, for its importance to environmental sustainability generally and for its importance in underpinning many aspects of the economy.

Devon County Council's Strategic Plan "Our Devon – A Focus on the Future" sets out the aim of improving the quality of life for all and integral to this is protecting and enhancing the county's rich and varied natural environment and outstanding cultural heritage. These contribute to the high quality of life enjoyed by Devon residents and are a major attraction for visitors to Devon. A key objective of the Strategic Plan is to Improve Devon's Environment to ensure it continues to be great place to live, visit and conduct business.

"More Creative Lives" – the County Council's Arts Policy, adopted in April 2005, recognises the importance the arts play in revitalising the world we live in. In particular the arts show us how we can refresh our environments and enrich the public realm. They can be a focus for community identity and distinctiveness. A strategic role of the County Council is realising the potential of the arts in making Devon an even better place to live. The County Council will support the engagement of artists to enhance the public realm and improve the quality of buildings and natural environments by contributing to the design process.

Sustainable Development are dealt with in a separate Briefing Paper, however it is impossible to extricate urban design from the objectives of sustain development. Creating a better quality of life for everyone, conserving resources, protecting environmental assets and meeting the needs of the community in terms of housing, safety, social and cultural needs can be transposed from one to another. Urban Design and Sustainability have a common language which is important particularly in the way new development is delivered. PPS1 (Sustainable development) states

“Good design ensures attractive, usable, durable and adaptable places and is a key element in achieving sustainable development”

Devon’s overall vision and objectives for delivering a high quality Urban Design is:

To identify the distinctive character and features of Devon’s existing settlements, urban and rural areas which should be conserved and enhanced through the following objectives:

- *All new development should respect and enhance the qualities of the area by building on and improving the sense of place and local distinctiveness*
- *Existing and new open space, including the public realm, should enhance the quality of life in urban and rural areas.*
- *Regenerate, conserve and enhance the urban environment of Devon through reinforcing connections between people and places, improving movement and urban form, and nature and the built form.*
- *Protect the county’s environmental assets and ensure that development proposals are sympathetic to Devon’s distinctive character*

3. Key Issues to Address

a) Raise the standards of all development across the county

Over the Period of the Devon Structure Plan (2001-16) there is an allocation of 65,500 dwellings to be built across the county. This equates to two settlements the size of Exmouth being built in Devon over a 15 year period. The two new settlements in East Devon (Cranbrook) and South Hams (Sherford) account for nearly 11% of the new development across the county. In order for them to be delivered these developments require detailed Master Plans, Town Codes and Design Codes. In order to deliver a higher standard of design, all developments should build on and enhance which ever part of the county it is located in.

b) Create excellence in urban design, building construction and the management of the public realm

Ensure urban design principles are applied to new homes to create safe, adaptable “whole life” dwellings. It is essential that buildings and places are well designed, containing a mixture of house types that meet the needs of local people thereby contributing to people’s well being.

In creating a quality public realm, it is important to ensure public spaces and routes are attractive, safe, uncluttered and work effectively for all in society, including the disabled and elderly people. It is important to create places that link together, are permeable and legible and lit to an appropriate level. They should be easy to move through, put people before traffic and integrate land uses and transport.

Apply urban design best practice principles to ensure public and private spaces are clearly distinguished, through promoting the continuity of street frontages and the enclosure of space by development which clearly defines private and public areas.

c) Reinforce the special quality and character of Devon

Devon is a “Unique Selling Point”, its landscape, natural, built and historic environment continue to make it a high priority for people to live, work and visit. Yet it is a finite and fragile resource that needs both protecting and enhancing if we are to pass on the legacy of an exceptional environment to future generations. Reinforcing the county’s distinctiveness, it is after all a series of local character areas, will be important to maintain that diversity and cultural uniqueness. The development of groups and organisations, such as the Devon Quality Design Initiative (DQDI), the Architecture Centre for Devon and Cornwall and Creating Excellence will assist in developing a network which establishes a quality design benchmark required by all development across Devon.

d) Ensure all new development assists in making communities sustainable

Sustainable communities are places where people want to live and work, both now and in the future. In order to meet the diverse needs of existing and future residents, they need to be sensitive to their environment and contribute to a high quality of life. They need to be safe and inclusive, well planned, built and run, and offer equality of opportunity and good services for all. All new development should contribute to achieving this goal.

e) Design Framework

“Planning Policy Statement 1: Delivering Sustainable Development” recognises the importance of applying good practice in seeking to achieve of high quality and inclusive design, and identifies the need for planning authorities and have regard to good practice set out in By Design – Urban design in the planning system: towards better practice; By Design – better places to live; Safer Places – the Planning System and Crime Prevention; and Planning and Access for Disabled People: A Good Practice Guide. The list of relevant publications is inevitably dynamic and in need of updating regularly. For example the emerging Manual for Streets (published 29 March 2007), replaces Design Bulletin 32 and Places, Streets and Movement.

4. Partnership Working

Devon County Council wishes to work in partnership with District Councils in further developing the above policy areas with design stakeholders and other organisations. It is currently working with District Council partners and the Arts Council to develop a county wide forum to raise the quality of design across the county.