

REGENERATION, COMMUNITY AND CULTURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

29 SEPTEMBER 2010

BUILDING FOR LIFE IMPLEMENTATION

Report from: Robin Cooper, Director for Regeneration, Community and Culture

Author: Frances Madders, Senior Urban Design Officer

Summary

Building for Life is the national standard for well-designed homes and neighbourhoods. It provides a method of assessing new housing developments against 20 criteria that embody a vision of functional, attractive and sustainable housing. It will be used as a framework for discussing the quality of proposals for housing development during pre-application planning meetings and for judging the quality of submissions for residential planning permission in Medway.

Members of the Planning Committee consider that implementation of the Building for Life assessment method in planning processes will prove a useful tool in raising the quality of new housing being delivered across Medway. Cabinet approval will be sought to proceed with implementing the assessment method in pre-application planning discussions and upon submission of planning applications with a significant housing component.

1. Budget and Policy Framework

- 1.1 The decision is within the council's policy and budget framework. Although the score derived from a BfL (Building for Life) assessment can be considered a material consideration in planning, the assessment method should be thought of as a tool, not a policy. Therefore its implementation does not require a change of policy and will be resourced out of existing revenue budgets.
- 1.2 Implementation of the BfL assessment method contributes to achieving the target set in the Local Area Agreement indicators for new homes supported by appropriate infrastructure.

2. Background

- 2.1 BfL is a government-endorsed assessment benchmark developed by CABE (Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment) and the Home Builders Federation. It is a method of assessing new housing developments against 20 criteria that embody a vision of functional, attractive and sustainable housing and that conform with the criteria set out in PPS3 for housing quality. Members of the Planning Committee consider that implementation of the BfL assessment method in planning processes will prove a useful tool in raising the quality of new housing being delivered across Medway.
- 2.2 Detailed proposals for how the tool will be used in Development Management processes are now in place. It will be used as a framework for discussing the quality of proposals for housing development during pre-application planning meetings and for judging the quality of submissions for residential planning permission in Medway.

3. Options

- 3.1 The two options are either to implement the use of BfL or to not implement it and to rely upon the existing planning tools and procedures for raising the quality of new housing in Medway.
- 3.2 The benefits of BfL are that:
- It provides a nationally recognised framework of what constitutes good housing so assisting in transparent and consistent decision making within existing policy frameworks;
 - It will be used to inform the development of further policies on housing design and quality;
 - It will be used as a constructive tool for negotiation and discussion to assist officers in providing advice to applicants;
 - It will support planning officers in dealing with housing design matters and raise general awareness of residential design quality;
 - Formal assessments of applications will be used as an evaluation pro forma in decision making and allow comparison between schemes;
 - It provides a means of specifying a target level of residential design quality in the Core Strategy and demonstrating progress in achieving that target.
- 3.3 There are no obvious disadvantages to the implementation of this tool. Officer and Planning Committee Member training will be required but is to be resourced out of existing budgets and should be considered an investment in staff development and robust planning decision-making. Applicants may raise initial concerns that the use of BfL represents an additional administrative burden. However, these are likely to be allayed through experience of the benefits of using BfL to structure pre-application negotiations.

4. Advice and analysis

- 4.1 The benefits of the implementation of BfL are set out above. Design and Conservation, Development Management and Integrated Transport have worked together to agree an approach to implementation and the training required to support it. The agreed approach has considered resource and cost implications and concluded that the potential benefits of implementation justify the additional training required and the officer resource diverted away from other activities. It is proposed that this will be kept under regular review.
- 4.2 PPS3 sets out how greater social, economic and environmental sustainability is inherent in achieving better quality homes and housing. BfL is a tool developed specifically to help Local Authorities deliver on the policies set out in PPS3. Each of the BfL criteria directly address different aspects of sustainability and are set out in the table appended to this report.
- 4.3 BfL also supports the delivery of mixed and balanced communities by requiring that developments provide a mix of tenure and dwelling types. A Diversity Impact Assessment screening will be required.

5. Risk management

- 5.1 The following table provides a summary of the significant risks that may arise from the implementation of Building for Life.

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk
Discouraging residential development.	The BfL assessment tool is intended to raise the quality of new housing being delivered across Medway. This may imply increased design and construction costs to the developer affecting the viability of marginal sites. This risk is rated D-2.	Compliance with desirable quality thresholds will be a consideration in the granting of planning permission. Continuous monitoring will be required to ensure that the correct balance is struck between the quality and quantity of housing delivered.
Reduced credibility of the BfL tool.	Some of the criteria require fine evaluative judgement of response to context and architectural quality. Inconsistent interpretation of the BfL criteria by Officers and Planning Committee members could undermine the credibility of the BfL assessment method and therefore the benefits that it can provide. This risk is rated B-2.	Informal assessments: to be supported by training workshops for Officers. Formal assessments: support for the authority of the judgement of accredited assessors. Member training to reinforce understanding of the application of BfL.

6. Consultation

- 6.1 The assessment method is a tool, not a policy, and its implementation is intended to embed housing design principles in development management processes. Statutory consultation is not a requirement of implementing the assessment tool.
- 6.2 However, Cabinet will be asked on October 19 2010 to approve statutory consultation on the draft Medway Housing Design Standards (scheduled to run for six weeks from 1 November 2010). These are technical requirements that will provide advice on both design principles and the minimum layout and room sizes that will be expected in the design of new housing and in the conversion of existing properties. The Medway Housing Design Standards is a proposed Supplementary Planning Document.
- 6.3 Developers, landowners and their advisors will have an opportunity to comment on the implementation of Building for Life via consultation on the draft Medway Housing Design Standards.

7. Financial and legal implications

- 7.1 There are no significant financial implications of the following recommendation.
- 7.2 Adoption of the Building for Life assessment will assist the Council in demonstrating that they are applying consistent and objective standards in assessing housing design and so should help in defending appeals against the refusal of planning permission.

8. Recommendations

- 8.1 That the Committee consider any observations it may wish to make to the Cabinet on the implementation of the Building for Life assessment method in the planning processes.

Lead officer contact

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Appendix 1

Building for Life – the 20 criteria

Environment and Community	1. Does the development provide for (or is close to) community facilities such as a school, parks, play areas, shops, pubs, or cafes?
	2. Is there an accommodation mix that reflects the needs and aspiration of the local community?
	3. Is there a tenure mix that reflects the needs of the local community?
	4. Does the development have easy access to public transport?
	5. Does the development have any features that reduce its environmental impact?
Character	6. Is the design specific to the scheme?
	7. Does the scheme exploit existing buildings, landscape, or topography?
	8. Does the scheme feel like a place with a distinctive character?
	9. 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 highways do not dominate?
	12. Is the car parking well integrated and situated so that 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 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?

2008 EDITION

Delivering great places to live:
20 questions you need to answer

BUILDING FOR LIFE

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Building for Life is the national standard for well-designed homes and neighbourhoods.

It is led by CABI and the Home Builders Federation and backed by the Housing Corporation, English Partnerships, Design for Homes and the Civic Trust.


The 20 Building for Life criteria embody the partners' vision of what housing developments should be: attractive, functional and sustainable. These principles are founded on government policy and on guidance developed by CABI in partnership with Design for Homes. The Building for Life criteria are used to evaluate the quality of schemes at both the pre-planning and post-construction phases.

This guide explains the 20 questions and refers to the policy guidance that helped shape them. It can be used as a guide for developers and housing associations writing development briefs and by design teams preparing their plans. Local authorities can also use it while developing planning guidance, assessing applications or completing annual monitoring returns.

You will also find examples of Building for Life award winners and the type of evidence a design team might prepare to show how a scheme meets the criteria on each of the pages. For complete case studies along with detailed guidance on how to prepare evidence for a Building for Life assessment, please visit www.buildingforlife.org.

How to use this guide

Example of an award winning scheme that meets the criterion



The formal open space at the heart of Butts Green, Warrington, provides a communal area to be enjoyed by all residents.

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

Explanation of the issues

The space around buildings is as important as the buildings themselves. Any development should be able to provide some public open space, whether it is for children's play and adventure, or for reflection and learning. If this is well designed it will result in a pleasurable place that will be popular and well used. This brings with it economic, social, environmental and cultural benefits.

Good public space is usually planned for a particular use. Too often, public space is the area left once buildings have been planned. This can lead to undefined areas with no specific use. >


Criterion

IS PUBLIC SPACE WELL DESIGNED AND DOES IT HAVE SUITABLE MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS IN PLACE?

DESIGN & CONSTRUCTION

16

Example of evidence showing how a design meets the criterion



This drawing provides detailed information about the proposed play area, and shows how the design of the surrounding streets will help integrate this space into its context.

Quote from relevant policy guidance

PPG17 (planning for open space): 'New open spaces should improve the quality of the public realm through good design.'

Further reading

- > Start with the park (CABE Space, 2008)
- > www.greenflagaward.org.uk

Well-designed lighting, street furniture, careful detailing and attractive planting can improve the quality of public space. Uncultured and well-maintained areas that are designed for a variety of experiences will help create places which are lively, pleasant to use and develop a sense of wellbeing among users. A maintenance plan needs to be in place from the start to guarantee long-term success.

'Properties that overlook a park can attract a premium of 5 per cent to 7 per cent above an identical property in the same market area but outside the vicinity of the park.' CABE Space, 2005

Criterion

16

IS PUBLIC SPACE WELL DESIGNED AND DOES IT HAVE SUITABLE MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS IN PLACE?

DESIGN & CONSTRUCTION

THE BUILDING FOR LIFE QUESTIONS

ENVIRONMENT & COMMUNITY

1. Does the development provide (or is it close to) community facilities, such as a school, parks, play areas, shops, pubs or cafés?
2. Is there an accommodation mix that reflects the needs and aspirations of the local community?
3. Is there a tenure mix that reflects the needs of the local community?
4. Does the development have easy access to public transport?
5. Does the development have any features that reduce its environmental impact?

CHARACTER

6. Is the design specific to the scheme?
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9. Do the buildings and layout make it easy to find your way around?
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STREETS, PARKING & PEDESTRIANISATION

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



This café in the Horsebridge development at Whitstable provides an amenity for local residents and adds vibrancy to the street.

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

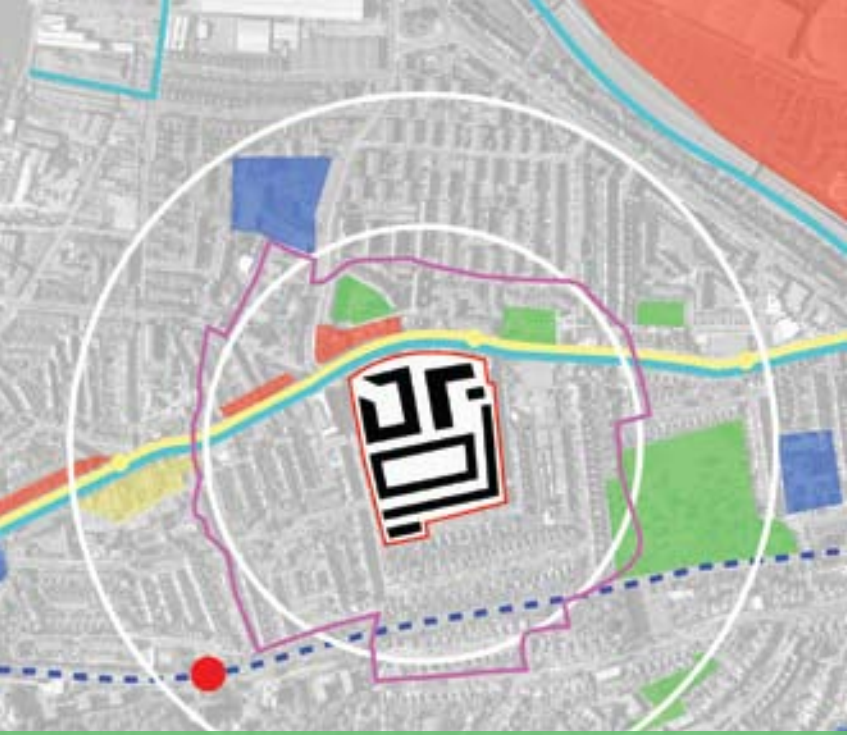
Creating successful residential areas is about much more than just providing opportunities for homes that respond to people's needs. It is about providing a framework within which communities can grow.

Appropriate community facilities and services, such as open spaces, crèches, day-care and health services, local pubs and other places for residents, are important in this framework. Large developments or schemes in urban areas should include facilities that help meet the needs of the area. Services benefit from being close together so planning should allow for this in areas with greatest access. >

DOES THE DEVELOPMENT PROVIDE (OR IS IT CLOSE TO) COMMUNITY FACILITIES, SUCH AS A SCHOOL, PARKS, PLAY AREAS, SHOPS, PUBS OR CAFÉS?

ENVIRONMENT & COMMUNITY

1



This diagram indicates which facilities are available within a five and 10 minute walking radius of the development.

PPS3 (housing): 'The government's policy is to ensure that housing is developed in suitable locations which offer a range of community facilities and with good access to jobs, key services and infrastructure.'

Consulting the local community can help make sure that plans reflect community needs as well as encouraging local people to get involved in making decisions about their neighbourhood. For smaller developments, features that might help unite the community could include play areas, a gym and health facilities. If facilities are not provided within the development, the layout should make sure people have easy access to nearby facilities.

Further reading:

- > *Urban Design Compendium 2* (English Partnerships and Housing Corporation, 2007); p78
- > *The home buyer's guide* (Alex Ely, CABE and Black Dog Publishing, 2004); pp18 to 21

1

DOES THE DEVELOPMENT PROVIDE (OR IS IT CLOSE TO) COMMUNITY FACILITIES, SUCH AS A SCHOOL, PARKS, PLAY AREAS, SHOPS, PUBS OR CAFÉS?

ENVIRONMENT & COMMUNITY



South at Didsbury Point, Manchester, provides a range of accommodation types, from one-bedroom flats to five-bedroom family homes.

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

Neighbourhoods are more successful when they avoid large concentrations of housing of the same type.

A good mix of housing types and sizes is important in creating a basis for a balanced community. Even comparatively small developments can have a wide mix of types of property. Also, a mix of housing types and uses can create more attractive residential environments with greater diversity in building forms and scales.

A mix of accommodation provides opportunities for communities where people can move home without leaving a neighbourhood. A well-designed neighbourhood will provide accommodation that meets the needs of single person households, small and large families as well as offering live-work possibilities. >

IS THERE AN ACCOMMODATION MIX THAT REFLECTS THE NEEDS AND ASPIRATIONS OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITY?

ENVIRONMENT & COMMUNITY

2



This diagram shows the number and location of different accommodation types in the development.

PPS3 (housing): ‘Developers should... reflect demand and the profile of households requiring market housing, in order to sustain mixed communities. Proposals for affordable housing should reflect the size and type of affordable housing required.’

However, the mix needs to be designed and managed carefully. Layouts should aim to reduce possible tensions between families, older people and students for example by considering the different activities of these groups and maintaining privacy between them.

‘Since 1971, the average size of household has declined from 2.91 persons to 2.31, while one-person households have grown from 17 per cent to 31 per cent.’
Office for National Statistics, 2004

Further reading:

- > *Better places to live: a companion guide to PPG3* (DTLR and CABE, 2001); chapter 4, pp34 to 35
- > *Capital gains: making high-density housing work* (London Housing Federation, 2002)

2

IS THERE AN ACCOMMODATION MIX THAT REFLECTS THE NEEDS AND ASPIRATIONS OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITY?

ENVIRONMENT & COMMUNITY



Gun Wharf, Plymouth, was developed in close collaboration with the existing residents and provides a tenure mix in accordance with the local community.

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

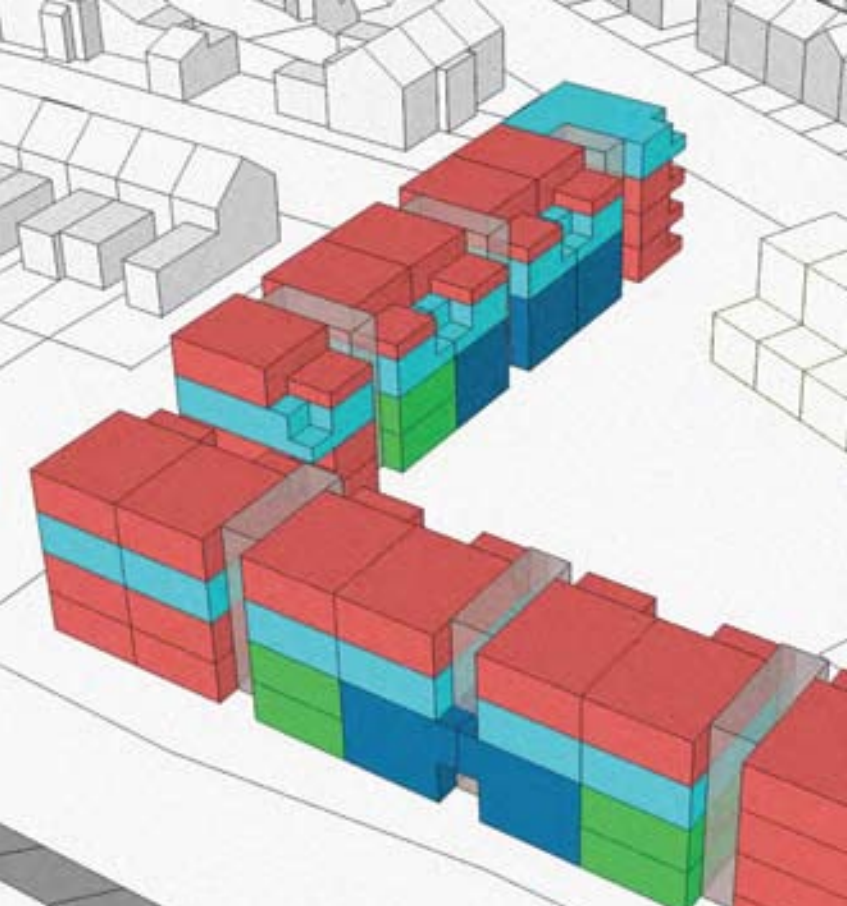
We can create neighbourhoods that cater for various socio-economic groups by having a mix of housing tenure. This includes providing social and privately rented accommodation, shared ownership properties and houses for outright sale.

A poor mix of housing tenure, if continued across a number of developments, can lead to a social imbalance and result in unsustainable communities. A large development should have the full range of tenures. For smaller developments, the tenure provision should support the existing mix of the area or introduce new tenures if necessary. >

IS THERE A TENURE MIX THAT REFLECTS THE NEEDS OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITY?

ENVIRONMENT & COMMUNITY

3



This diagram uses colour coding to show the different types of tenure and their location within the development

PPS3 (housing): '[The planning system should deliver] a mix of housing, both market and affordable, particularly in terms of tenure and price, to support a wide variety of households in all areas, both urban and rural.'

The percentage of affordable housing should be based on an assessment of the area in question. Successful development fully integrates the tenure mix, avoiding differentiation between individual dwellings and parts of the scheme based on their tenure.

Further reading:

> *Better places to live: a companion guide to PPG3* (DTLR and CABE, 2001); Chapter 4, pp34 to 35

3

IS THERE A TENURE MIX THAT REFLECTS THE NEEDS OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITY?
ENVIRONMENT & COMMUNITY



The Village at Caterham is served by a regular bus service to the town centre and the railway station.

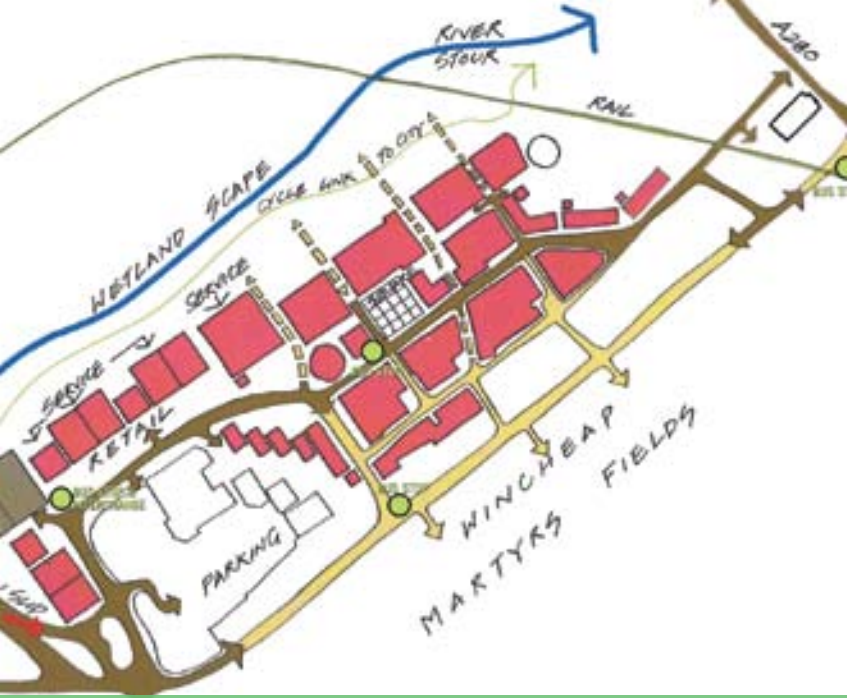
Does the development have easy access to public transport?

Proximity to good public transport and facilities (see criterion 1) is essential in reducing the number of car journeys and making a place more accessible to a variety of groups. An effective way of achieving this is to link new housing into existing transport infrastructure, such as a railway station, tram route or bus service. >

DOES THE DEVELOPMENT HAVE EASY ACCESS TO PUBLIC TRANSPORT?

ENVIRONMENT & COMMUNITY

4



This drawing marks out the bus stops and rail stations that will service this community.

PPS3 (housing): Local planning authorities should consider if a development: 'Is easily accessible and well-connected to public transport.'

This will vary from place to place. Environmentally friendly travel plans, car pooling, car clubs and other management-led solutions should be considered as part of an overall car strategy. For smaller developments, public transport connections within a 400-metre radius or five-minute walk would be sufficient.

Further reading:

- > *Better places to live: a companion guide to PPG3* (DTLR and CABE, 2001); p27
- > *Urban Design Compendium 2* (English Partnerships and Housing Corporation, 2007); p33

In 2006 28 per cent of all adults in the UK did not hold a full driving license. 25 per cent of all adults lived in a household with no car. DfT, 2006.

4

DOES THE DEVELOPMENT HAVE EASY ACCESS TO PUBLIC TRANSPORT?

ENVIRONMENT & COMMUNITY



Great Bow Yard, Somerset, features passive-solar energy, thermally massive design and lightweight timber frame construction. It also incorporates a sustainable urban drainage system and a protected wildlife habitat.

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

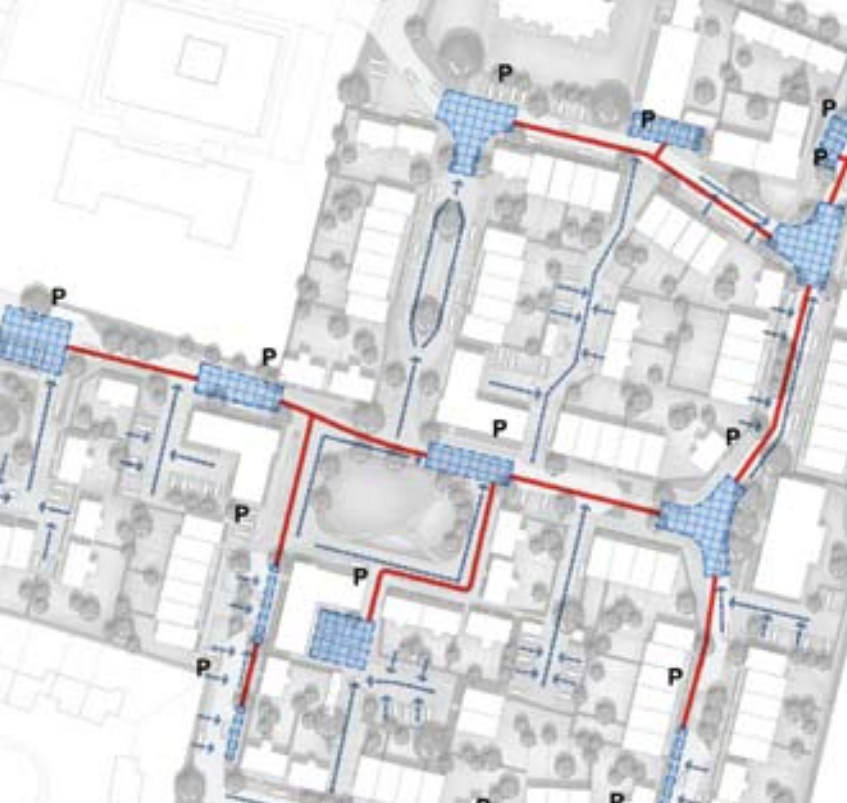
With growing concern about climate change, building for sustainability is a necessity. Choices about where to build should be influenced by the resources and sustainability of a site. New solutions need to be explored that promote sustainable development, and should be considered from the start when doing risk assessments for land.

There is a wide variety of ways that housebuilders can reduce a scheme's effect on the environment. This question relates to the overall development where site-wide environmental approaches have been adopted (environmental design for individual houses is covered in criterion 20). >

DOES THE DEVELOPMENT HAVE ANY FEATURES THAT REDUCE ITS ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT?

ENVIRONMENT & COMMUNITY

5



This diagram outlines how a sustainable urban drainage system will operate in this development, providing evidence of how the environmental impact will be reduced.

PPS3 (housing): Local planning authorities should consider if a development: 'Facilitates the efficient use of resources, during construction and in use, and seeks to adapt to and reduce the impact of, and on, climate change.'

The code for sustainable homes lists the following measures:

- using alternative and renewable energy schemes
- promoting recycling
- using sustainable drainage systems
- reducing construction waste
- prioritising brownfield development
- increasing biodiversity.

Further reading:

- > *Urban Design Compendium 2* (English Partnerships and Housing Corporation, 2007); section 1.3
- > *Code for sustainable homes* (DCLG, 2006)

5

DOES THE DEVELOPMENT HAVE ANY FEATURES THAT REDUCE ITS ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT?

ENVIRONMENT & COMMUNITY



The Old Haymarket development in Manchester is a direct response to the triangular site it occupies and successfully creates a building to fit its context.

Is the design specific to the scheme?

The design of individual homes and entire neighbourhoods should be specific to the client's brief and the context, based on an understanding of the way the local area looks and works. This is part of a strong design process.

Good design is about offering solutions that allow us to build and live more efficiently. It is not about style. A good design should make best use of the land, provide value and create successful places with character, variety and identity.

The overall look and feel of a new development should be considered in relation to neighbouring buildings and the local area more generally. >



This diagram identifies important local features and outlines how the design responds to the urban/rural interface, how it relates to the nearby city centre and allows views to adjacent landscape features.

Urban Design Compendium 1 (English Partnerships and Housing Corporation, 2000): 'A thorough appreciation of the overall site context is the starting point for designing a distinct place' p19

New housing should promote or reinforce local distinctiveness without stifling innovation. The best schemes are usually those that recognise the individuality of a place, and either tailor standard solutions or create particular and original architecture for that site.

Further reading:

- > *Urban Design Compendium 2* (English Partnerships and Housing Corporation, 2007); p41, p65
- > *Design review: how CABE evaluates quality in architecture and urban design* (CABE, 2006); p10



The Village at Caterham has made use of existing buildings, preserved mature trees and maintained views out to the surrounding countryside.

Does the scheme exploit existing buildings, landscape or topography?

Few development sites come as empty blocks of land. Many have existing buildings and some are rich with archaeology or important natural environments. In some cases, buildings are listed or within conservation areas. In others, preservation orders apply to some trees.

New housing should respond to and reinforce locally distinctive patterns of development, landscape and culture. Historic environments and local landmarks can help give a neighbourhood a strong sense of identity, attracting residents and investors. >

DOES THE SCHEME EXPLOIT EXISTING BUILDINGS, LANDSCAPE OR TOPOGRAPHY?

CHARACTER

7



This physical model of the site has been overlaid with a commentary to identify key features that will have implications for the layout and design of homes - and gives an idea of the existing vegetation.

PPS3 (housing): 'If done well, imaginative design and layout of new development can lead to a more efficient use of land without compromising the quality of the local environment.'

A design that reflects and improves the site and its surroundings will help create a sense of character. It does not have to copy the style of surrounding architecture to belong to an area, but may benefit by responding to the scale and materials of surrounding buildings, the aspect of the site and particular views.

Further reading:

> *Urban Design Compendium 2* (English Partnerships and Housing Corporation, 2007); p41, p65

7

DOES THE SCHEME EXPLOIT EXISTING BUILDINGS, LANDSCAPE OR TOPOGRAPHY?
CHARACTER



Buildings at Highgate, Durham, vary greatly within a consistent overall pattern, creating the organic feel of a quarter that has evolved over a long period.

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

Successful places tend to be those that have their own distinct identity. How a neighbourhood looks affects how residents feel about where they live. Character and quality help increase community pride. The ability of a scheme to create a sense of place greatly depends on the quality of the buildings and the spaces around them. This not only needs architecture of a high standard but a strong landscape strategy. It is about character, identity and variety. >

DOES THE SCHEME FEEL LIKE A PLACE WITH A DISTINCTIVE CHARACTER?

CHARACTER

8



This sketch gives a good impression of the intended character of the development, demonstrating the typology of buildings and open spaces - and how they relate to each other.

PPS3 (housing): Local planning authorities should consider if a development: 'Creates, or enhances, a distinctive character that relates well to the surroundings and supports a sense of local pride and civic identity.'

A design with character needs to be supported by strong ideas. These ideas may be about reflecting contemporary society and culture or about responding to local patterns of development and landscape.

"Character areas can reinforce local identity and serve as a marketing tool to raise the profile of a certain area."
English Partnerships/ Housing Corporation, 2000

Further reading:

- > *By design – urban design and the planning system: towards better practice* (DTLR, 2001); Section 2, p19
- > *Urban Design Compendium 2* (English Partnerships and Housing Corporation, 2007); p41

8

DOES THE SCHEME FEEL LIKE A PLACE WITH A DISTINCTIVE CHARACTER?

CHARACTER



Paths within the Empire Square development in London's Borough district are clearly laid out, and building features like the tower and canopy clearly mark points of entry.

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

A housing development should have a clear identity and be easy to understand for residents and visitors. A neighbourhood that is easy to get around tends to feel safer and more secure. It will have a clear network of streets, courtyards and alleyways that are interesting, welcoming and people-friendly. This network should link to existing routes and developments.

Navigation can be improved by creating landmarks and focal points, views, clear routes, gateways to particular areas, lighting, works of art and signs. >

DO THE BUILDINGS AND LAYOUT MAKE IT EASY TO FIND YOUR WAY AROUND?

CHARACTER

9



This conceptual diagram highlights how the building layout creates clear sight lines along movement routes and how a series of key public spaces could provide orientation.

Manual for Streets (DFT/DCLG, 2007): 'Street layouts... should aim to make the environment self explanatory to all users. Features such as public art, planting and architectural style can assist navigation while possibly reducing the need for signs.' p116

Layouts such as cul-de-sacs with winding roads and the same types of houses can make it more difficult to get around; they also encourage car use rather than walking or cycling. Corner buildings should be treated with particular care as they are often a useful way of giving directions and helping people to find places. Looking at a sectional drawing through a neighbourhood will help identify the change of scale and heights at key points in the layout, such as junctions or public spaces.

Further reading:

- > *Safer places, the planning system and crime prevention* (ODPM and Home Office); Section 2, p16
- > *Better places to live: a companion guide to PPG3* (DTLR and CABE, 2001); Chapter 5, p54

9

DO THE BUILDINGS AND LAYOUT MAKE IT EASY TO FIND YOUR WAY AROUND?

CHARACTER



The building arrangement in this Cambridge mews space create a strong sense of enclosure, while good overlook and soft landscaping stop it feeling restrictive

Are streets defined by a well-structured building layout?

Streets, homes, gardens, places for leisure and parking must be carefully arranged. A successful layout should be characterised by a framework of interconnected routes which define 'blocks' of housing, open spaces and other uses. Streets, squares, courts, mews, circuses and avenues are tried and tested layouts which can successfully achieve this.

Streets work well if there is a clear definition of the public and private realm. This can be achieved by arranging buildings to follow a continuous line and by creating active edges with doors and windows opening onto the street, which also increases surveillance. >



This figure-ground diagram shows the building layout and how this defines the surrounding streets and movement routes.

PPG17 (planning for open space): 'Local networks of high-quality and well-managed open space help to create urban environments that are attractive, clean and safe and can play a major part in improving people's sense of well-being.'

Design should start with the arrangement of buildings. Footpaths and roads can then be included in that arrangement, and within the wider neighbourhood structure. Generally, buildings should be positioned along and around public spaces, with small blocks that offer architectural variety and frequent entrances along the street.

Further reading:

> *Better places to live: a companion guide to PPG3* (DTLR and CABE, 2001); Chapter 5, p40

10

ARE STREETS DEFINED BY A
WELL-STRUCTURED BUILDING LAYOUT?
CHARACTER



At Scalebor Park, Burley-in-Wharfedale, the building layout and sympathetic landscaping create an inviting crescent and ensures that highways do not dominate.

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

The building layout should be the priority in any new housing development. Buildings of the appropriate size, proportion, shape and layout will help create well-defined streets and spaces, which are attractive and user-friendly, improving residents' quality of life.

In many recent housing layouts, more thought has been given to streets and car parking than to the arrangement of the buildings and the quality of the spaces created between them. >

DOES THE BUILDING LAYOUT TAKE PRIORITY OVER THE STREETS AND CAR PARKING, SO THAT THE HIGHWAYS DO NOT DOMINATE?

STREETS, PARKING & PEDESTRIANISATION

11



This drawing shows where car parking is accommodated in the scheme and the soft landscape elements used to soften its visual impact.

Car parking: what works where (English Partnerships, 2006): 'It is only through combining good external public environments with good home environments that successful neighbourhoods can be built.'

The rigid application of highway engineering standards for roads, junction separation distances and turning circles can create an environment which is unpleasant and difficult to use, especially for pedestrians. Streets and parking facilities should be designed to improve the usability and feel of an area but not to dominate it.

Further reading:

> *Better places to live: a companion guide to PPG3* (DTLR and CABE, 2001); Section 3, p29

11

DOES THE BUILDING LAYOUT TAKE PRIORITY OVER THE STREETS AND CAR PARKING, SO THAT THE HIGHWAYS DO NOT DOMINATE?

STREETS, PARKING & PEDESTRIANISATION



A mixture of soft and hard landscaping in this mews space in Waterstone Park, Stone, ensures that car parking does not dominate the street scene.

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

Car parking is one of the most difficult challenges in housing design. Discussions between planning authorities and developers should be influenced by a realistic assessment of likely patterns of car use as well as alternative options for parking. In many cases, a mix of parking will achieve the best results.

At roughly 30 to 50 dwellings per hectare, limiting parking squares and courtyards to 10 spaces will help avoid visual dominance. On-street parking can bring activity to the street and have a traffic-calming effect. Car parking should be designed into the scheme, making sure that the fronts of properties are not dominated by cars, and that there is a good relationship between houses and the street. >

IS THE CAR PARKING WELL INTEGRATED AND SITUATED SO IT SUPPORTS THE STREET SCENE?

STREETS, PARKING & PEDESTRIANISATION

12



This diagram shows the different ways that car parking is integrated into the scheme.

PPS3 (housing): Local planning authorities should consider if a development: 'Takes a design-led approach to the provision of car-parking space, that is well-integrated with a high quality public realm.'

In denser developments, experience suggests that where commercial viability and conditions allow, on-street parking combined with well-managed below-building parking provides the most satisfactory solution. Where possible, below-building parking should be efficiently designed to free up more space for attractive streets and more shared public areas. Any development should avoid large areas of unsupervised garage court parking.

Further reading:

- > *Better places to live: a companion guide to PPG3* (DTLR and CABE, 2001); Chapter 5, pp55 to 58
- > *Safer places, the planning system and crime prevention* (ODPM and Home Office); p27

12

IS THE CAR PARKING WELL INTEGRATED AND SITUATED SO IT SUPPORTS THE STREET SCENE?

STREETS, PARKING & PEDESTRIANISATION



The design and materials used in the main thoroughfare of the Pepys Estate, Deptford, makes it a safe space for cars, pedestrians and cyclists alike

Are the streets pedestrian, cycle and vehicle friendly?

Streets are the most used form of public space and they need to be designed to work well for us all.

Pedestrians and cyclists need routes that are safe, direct, accessible and free from barriers. Places with low speed limits are safer and can be achieved through the careful treatment of surfaces, junctions and crossings. In a low-speed environment, pedestrian, vehicular and cycle routes need not necessarily be segregated.

Homezones use materials, textures, patterns, furniture and good planting to divert and slow traffic. >

ARE THE STREETS PEDESTRIAN, CYCLE
AND VEHICLE FRIENDLY?

STREETS, PARKING & PEDESTRIANISATION

13



Movement routes for pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles are clearly marked out in this diagram, allowing an understanding of how each is accommodated in the development.

PPS3 (housing): Local planning authorities should consider if streets are: 'pedestrian, cycle and vehicle friendly.'

For busier streets with fast traffic, cycle routes and pavements should be clearly defined.

A good streetscape will offer direct connections and crossings that are convenient and easy to use. It should be well lit, feel safe and make it easy for users to find and follow a route.

Further reading:

- > *Better places to live: a companion guide to PPG3* (DTLR and CABE, 2001); Section 3, p26
- > Living Streets campaign www.livingstreets.org.uk

13

ARE THE STREETS PEDESTRIAN, CYCLE AND VEHICLE FRIENDLY?

STREETS, PARKING & PEDESTRIANISATION



Chronos, east London, successfully integrates with its surroundings by reinterpreting the form of adjacent buildings and maintaining a strong façade in line with existing development.

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

New housing does not exist on its own. Streets and footpaths should be connected to existing routes and neighbourhoods, creating a district that is accessible and easy to get around. A well-designed development should be easy to get to and move through, making the most of existing or proposed facilities in the area. This needs streets, footpaths and public spaces which link into well-used routes.

A seamless network of routes and public spaces will help create a community that includes all residents. >

DOES THE SCHEME INTEGRATE WITH EXISTING STREETS, PATHS AND SURROUNDING DEVELOPMENT?

STREETS, PARKING & PEDESTRIANISATION

14



This diagram shows the permeability of the development site and how it connects to existing movement networks.

PPS1 (sustainable development): 'High-quality and inclusive design should create well-mixed and integrated developments which avoid segregation and have well-planned public spaces.'

Safe access points into and through the development increase opportunities for walking and help reduce our reliance on cars.

Designing well-connected layouts depends on the local context (including local security issues) and how the development relates to existing areas. Plans of the surrounding area are useful because they show the continuity between new and existing development.

Further reading:

- > *The home buyer's guide* (Alex Ely, CABI and Black Dog Publishing, 2004); p19
- > *Safer places, the planning system and crime prevention* (ODPM and Home Office); p16

14

DOES THE SCHEME INTEGRATE WITH EXISTING STREETS, PATHS AND SURROUNDING DEVELOPMENT?

STREETS, PARKING & PEDESTRIANISATION



The balconies and windows on this block at Angell Town, south London, ensure that the adjacent footpath and green space is well overlooked.

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

Design has a crucial role to play in creating places that not only feel safe, but are safe. Developments should be planned in a way that makes sure buildings overlook all public spaces, roads and footpaths to increase surveillance.

Windows and doors opening onto all streets and footpaths can provide greater security for users. Bay and corner windows will provide views in different directions, as well as bringing more light into homes. >

ARE PUBLIC SPACES AND PEDESTRIAN ROUTES OVERLOOKED AND DO THEY FEEL SAFE?

STREETS, PARKING & PEDESTRIANISATION

15



This diagram marks entrance ways and ground floor windows, providing a good sense of where active frontages are and which areas are overlooked.

PPG17 (planning for open space): 'In identifying where to locate new areas of open space...carefully consider security and personal safety, especially for children.'

Blank gable walls facing onto public spaces should be avoided. Street lighting needs to be carefully considered to cover all vulnerable areas. Light levels need to be fairly even throughout developments.

Further reading:

- > *Safer places, the planning system and crime prevention* (ODPM and Home Office); p24

15

ARE PUBLIC SPACES AND PEDESTRIAN ROUTES OVERLOOKED AND DO THEY FEEL SAFE?

STREETS, PARKING & PEDESTRIANISATION



The formal open space at the heart of Butts Green, Warrington, provides a communal area to be enjoyed by all residents.

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

The space around buildings is as important as the buildings themselves. Any development should be able to provide some public open space, whether it is for children's play and adventure, or for reflection and learning. If this is well designed it will result in a pleasurable place that will be popular and well used. This brings with it economic, social, environmental and cultural benefits.

Good public space is usually planned for a particular use. Too often, public space is the area left once buildings have been planned. This can lead to undefined areas with no specific use. >

IS PUBLIC SPACE WELL DESIGNED AND DOES IT HAVE SUITABLE MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS IN PLACE?

DESIGN & CONSTRUCTION

16



This drawing provides detailed information about the proposed play area, and shows how the design of the surrounding streets will help integrate this space into its context.

PPG17 (planning for open space): 'New open spaces should improve the quality of the public realm through good design.'

Well-designed lighting, street furniture, careful detailing and attractive planting can improve the quality of public space. Uncluttered and well-maintained areas that are designed for a variety of experiences will help create places which are lively, pleasant to use and develop a sense of wellbeing among users. A maintenance plan needs to be in place from the start to guarantee long-term success.

Further reading:

- > *Start with the park* (CABE Space, 2005)
- > www.greenflagaward.org.uk

'Properties that overlook a park can attract a premium of 5 per cent to 7 per cent above an identical property in the same market area but outside the vicinity of the park.'

CABE Space, 2005

16

IS PUBLIC SPACE WELL DESIGNED AND DOES IT HAVE SUITABLE MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS IN PLACE?

DESIGN & CONSTRUCTION



The detailing of materials on these buildings at Chapel, Southampton, presents a strong frontage to the street. Well-sized balconies provide overlook and outdoor amenity space for residents.

Do buildings exhibit architectural quality?

Architectural quality is about being fit for purpose, durable, well built and pleasing to the mind and the eye. Good architecture works well for its intended use. Housing design should be well thought through and cater for the residents' needs. From the design of the exteriors and interiors to the surrounding landscaping, planners, developers and design teams should ensure that a significant proportion of home-buyers have their spirits lifted by what is on offer.

Good architecture is less to do with a particular style and more to do with the successful co-ordination of proportions, materials, colour and detail. Windows need to be arranged to look good but also to work for views and light inside the home. >

DO BUILDINGS EXHIBIT ARCHITECTURAL QUALITY?

CHARACTER

17



This drawing provides an accurate sense of the scale, massing and façade treatment of the proposed building and provides important information about the design's response to the local setting.

PPS1 (sustainable development): 'Good design ensures attractive, usable, durable and adaptable places and is a key element in achieving sustainable development.'

Details need to be considered as an important part of the building and not as an add-on. Particular care should be given to corners, roof lines and how the building meets the ground. These have a significant effect on the overall impression of a building.

'72 per cent of home buyers believe that well-designed houses will increase in value quicker than average.'
CABE/MORI, 2000

Further reading:

- > *By design – urban design and the planning system: towards better practice* (DTLR, 2001); Section 2, p16
- > *Design review: how CABE evaluates quality in architecture and urban design* (CABE, 2006); p14



The rooms at Selwyn Street, Oldham, permit a wide variety of furniture arrangements depending on the needs of inhabitants. Non-load-bearing internal walls allow for later adaptation.

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

A well-designed home will need to take account of changing demands and lifestyles of the future by providing flexible internal layouts and allowing for cost-effective alterations. Housing should be able to respond to changing social, technological and economic conditions. >

DO INTERNAL SPACES AND LAYOUT
ALLOW FOR ADAPTATION, CONVERSION
OR EXTENSION?

DESIGN & CONSTRUCTION

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This floor plan indicates the area and internal layout and highlights load-bearing walls, allowing the adaptability of the space to be determined.

The main consideration is adaptability. For houses, the design could accommodate a downstairs toilet, wider doorways, level entrances and allow for a lift or stair lift to be fitted in the future. The potential to extend back or upwards, or to open up between rooms to allow open-plan living, is valuable, as is garden space and the space to allow a conservatory to be added.

For houses and apartments, if outside walls carry structural loads this allows for partitions to be added or removed inside to suit the owner's needs. And if rooms are big enough to allow them to be used in a variety of ways, for example, as a work space, study, bedroom or playroom, this adds flexibility.

"A good project will continue to provide value for money and meet user needs throughout its lifetime."
National Audit Office, 2004

Further reading:

- > www.jrf.org.uk/housingandcare/lifetimehomes/
- > *Better places to live: a companion guide to PPG3* (DTLR and CABE, 2001); Chapter 6, p66
- > *Getting value for money from construction projects through design: how auditors can help*, (National Audit Office, 2004)



Abbots Wharf, east London, made use of a lightweight, hybrid steel and concrete frame, prefabricated bathroom pods and frameless glass balconies, which allowed for a shorter build time.

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

Advanced building technology can contribute to the environmental performance of a home, reduce defects in construction, improve health and safety on site, and increase overall efficiency. It has been shown that using modern methods of construction, up to four times as many homes can be built with the same on-site labour, and on-site construction time can be halved. Modern methods of construction include a variety of build approaches and products, covering off-site manufacturing and innovations in process and the way people work. >

HAS THE SCHEME MADE USE OF ADVANCES IN CONSTRUCTION OR TECHNOLOGY THAT ENHANCE ITS PERFORMANCE, QUALITY, AND ATTRACTIVENESS?

DESIGN & CONSTRUCTION

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This drawing illustrates how a house type is developed out of a modular system and helps explain how this technique might improve the performance, quality and attractiveness of the scheme.

Examples of systems that are considered as advanced forms of construction include prefabricated elements such as 'thin joint blocks' (glued brick panels), fast track foundations or advanced methods of cladding. They may involve more substantial forms of construction such as tunnel form (concrete formed units) or precast concrete panels, timber or steel panellised wall units and floor cassettes or volumetric construction (also known as modular construction) of kitchen or bathroom pods or even entire apartments fully fitted prior to installation on site.

"We want to encourage quicker, better quality house building through...better procurement, good value rather than lowest cost, and through better design and modern methods of construction".
ODPM, 2003

Further reading:

- > *Homing in on excellence: a commentary on the use of offsite fabrication methods for the UK housebuilding industry* (The Housing Forum, Rethinking Construction)
- > *Manufacturing excellence: UK capacity in offsite manufacturing* (Constructing Excellence, 2004)
- > *Prefabulous homes: the new house building agenda* (David Birkbeck and Andrew Scoones, Constructing Excellence, 2005)
- > *Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future* (ODPM, 2003); p38
- > *Using Modern Methods of Construction to Build Homes More Quickly & Efficiently* (National Audit Office, 2005); part 2

19

HAS THE SCHEME MADE USE OF ADVANCES IN CONSTRUCTION OR TECHNOLOGY THAT ENHANCE ITS PERFORMANCE, QUALITY, AND ATTRACTIVENESS?

DESIGN & CONSTRUCTION



The interior of this flat at Timber Wharf, Manchester, provides a generous living space and the open design allows excellent day lighting.

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

Features such as generous space, good natural light, energy efficiency and good sound insulation can greatly improve the popularity of a home and the quality of life for the people who live in it.

Well-designed homes will excel in some, if not all, of these areas. This should not be achieved at the expense of the overall design quality of the scheme.

Good space standards contribute to the long-term flexibility and future proofing (able to accommodate changing lifestyle demands) of a home. >

DO BUILDINGS OR SPACES OUTPERFORM STATUTORY MINIMA, SUCH AS BUILDING REGULATIONS?

DESIGN & CONSTRUCTION

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Detailed cross-sections provide information about internal spaces and how they relate to the outdoors.

Code for sustainable homes (DCLG, 2006): 'In 2004, more than a quarter of the UK's carbon dioxide emissions – a major cause of climate change – came from the energy we use to heat, light and run our homes.'

For various aspects of building performance, including energy efficiency, the higher levels of achievement listed in the code for sustainable homes is the relevant reference point.

Good sound insulation between homes is important, especially for schemes where there are lots of houses close together. The biggest effect on privacy is sound coming through dividing walls.

'79 per cent of homebuyers consider space to be the most important design feature in a home'
CABE, 2005

Further reading:

- > *Housing quality indicators*
www.communities.gov.uk/housingqualityindicators
- > *The green guide to housing specification* (Anderson and Howard, BRE, 2000)
- > www.ecohomes.org
- > *Perceptions of privacy and density* (Design for Homes, Popular Housing Research, 2003)
- > *Code for sustainable homes* (DCLG, 2006)

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DO BUILDINGS OR SPACES OUTPERFORM STATUTORY MINIMA, SUCH AS BUILDING REGULATIONS?

DESIGN & CONSTRUCTION

FURTHER READING

Better places to live: a companion guide to PPG3

(DTLR and CABE, 2001)

By design - urban design and the planning system: towards better practice (DTLR, 2001)

Capital gains: making high-density housing work

(London Housing Federation, 2002)

Car parking: what works where

(English Partnerships and Design for Homes, 2006)

Code for sustainable homes (DCLG, 2006)

Design review: how CABE evaluates quality in architecture and urban design (CABE 2006)

Getting value for money from construction projects through design: how auditors can help (National Audit Office, 2004)

Homing in on excellence: a commentary on the use of offsite fabrication methods for the UK housebuilding industry

(The Housing Forum, Rethinking Construction)

Housing quality indicators:

www.communities.gov.uk/housingqualityindicators

Lifetime Home standards:

www.jrf.org.uk/housingandcare/lifetimehomes

Manual for streets (DfT/DCLG, 2007)

Manufacturing excellence: UK capacity in offsite manufacturing

(Constructing Excellence, 2004)

Paving the way: how we achieve clean, safe and attractive streets

(ODPM and CABE, 2002)

Perceptions of privacy and density

(Design for Homes, Popular Housing Research, 2003)

Places, streets and movement: a companion guide to

design bulletin 32 (DETR, 1998)

Planning policy guidance 17 (PPG17): planning for open space, sport and recreation (ODPM, 2002)

Planning policy statement 1 (PPS1): delivering sustainable development (ODPM, 2005)

Planning policy statement 3 (PPS3): Housing (DCLG, 2006)

Prefabulous homes: the new housebuilding agenda

(David Birkbeck and Andrew Scoones, Constructing Excellence, 2005)

Safer places: the planning system and crime prevention

(ODPM and Home Office, 2004)

Start with the park (CABE Space, 2005)

Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future (ODPM, 2003)

The green guide to housing specification

(Anderson and Howard, BRE, 2000)

The home buyer's guide: what to look and ask for when

buying a new home (Alex Ely, CABE and Black Dog Publishing, 2004)

Urban Design Compendium 2 (English Partnerships and Housing Corporation, 2007)

www.greenflagaward.org.uk

www.ecohomes.org

This guide explains the 20 criteria used for the Building for Life standard. Developers can use the 20 questions that go with them as a basis for writing development briefs, helping them to speed up planning approvals and win local community support. Local authorities can use them to demand high standards of design. *Delivering great places to live* provides a valuable tool to assess design quality in new housing schemes. Anyone applying for the Building for Life standard should refer to this guide.

References: 2: *Living in Britain 2002* (Office for National Statistics, 2004), 4: *Transport statistics bulletin: National travel survey: 2006* (DfT, 2006), 8: *Urban design compendium 1* (English Partnerships and The Housing Corporation, 2000), 16: *Does money grow on trees?* (CABE Space, 2005), 17: *CABE and MORI research*, 2000, 18: *Getting value for money from construction projects through design: how auditors can help* (National Audit Office, 2004), 19: *Sustainable communities: building for the future* (ODPM, 2003), 20: *What homebuyers want* (CABE, 2005)

Building for Life is led by:



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