
design principles

a consultation draft



contents

introduction

- > the importance of good design
- > about DESIGN PRINCIPLES
- > key design principles
- > using DESIGN PRINCIPLES
- > professional advice

design principle one : respect for context

- > responsive design
- > settlement patterns
- > landscape
- > building form
- > building design

design principle two : sense of place

- > creating distinctive places
- > thinking about space
- > defining space
- > contrast & variety
- > views
- > road layout
- > landscaping

design principle three : good looking buildings

- > good looking buildings
- > order & balance
- > human scale
- > detail
- > expression

design principle four : sustainability

- > reducing energy use
- > lifetime costs
- > microclimate & ecology
- > water
- > wind

design principle five : a safe environment

- > safety
- > amenity

appendices

- > context assessment > further information
-



introduction

contents

- > about design principles
- > the importance of good design
- > key design principles
- > using design principles
- > professional advice



‘Since the Second World War, this country has seen very extensive urban development and renewal. While there are exceptions, a great deal of this development has been third-rate and is lacking in any ‘sense of place’.....We have repeated standard house types and layouts, retail boxes and road layouts so many times, with little or no regard for local context, until we find that now almost everywhere looks like everywhere else.’

> the importance of good design

The standard of design of new developments has a significant impact on the overall quality of the our environment. It affects people’s lives on a daily basis at home and at work.

Well-designed buildings enhance not only the appearance of places, and our enjoyment of them, but can deliver other benefits too. Good design makes practical and economic sense. Well-designed places function well, are easily accessible and feel safe. Good buildings are cost-effective to maintain, and provide flexible accommodation that can be adapted easily to meet changing circumstances. Good design can also deliver more sustainable forms of development, and help to avoid wasteful use of energy and materials.

The standard of design of new developments across the Breckland District varies considerably. Whilst there are examples of good practice, reviewing recent developments leads one inevitably to the conclusion that generally too little emphasis is placed on achieving design quality. As a result, opportunities presented by new development to enhance the environment and create places with identity are missed. This experience is by no means unusual. Over recent decades, new developments across the country have become increasingly standardised in form and appearance. This trend has been apparent not only in developments by volume house builders, but also in smaller housing schemes and commercial development too. Such standardisation has eroded the regional differences between places, and creates rather bland new development.

Loss of local identity is not an inevitable result of development, however. New development can enhance the quality of its local environment and can reinforce local distinctiveness. Good design, which responds positively and imaginatively to its context, is the key to success.



‘Good design should be the aim of all those involved in the development process and should be encouraged everywhere. Good design can help promote sustainable development; improve the quality of the existing environment; attract businesses and investment; and reinforce civic pride and a sense of place...’²

> about DESIGN PRINCIPLES

DESIGN PRINCIPLES has been produced by Breckland Council with a single principal purpose in mind : to encourage improvements in the design quality of new developments.

DESIGN PRINCIPLES seeks to achieve this aim by establishing a set of clear design criteria against which proposals may be judged and by raising awareness of the wide ranging benefits of good design.

DESIGN PRINCIPLES is aimed at everyone involved in the process of commissioning, designing and constructing new buildings. Although intended mainly as reference for designers and developers, it provides useful information for anyone interested in the Council's approach to building design.

POLICY ENV.26 of the Breckland District Local Plan (1999) states that: THE DISTRICT WILL SEEK TO ENSURE THAT ALL NEW BUILDINGS ARE DESIGNED TO A HIGH ARCHITECTURAL STANDARD, REFLECT LOCAL STYLES, CHARACTER AND MATERIALS AND ARE SYMPATHETIC TO THEIR PARTICULAR LOCATION.

The criteria set out in DESIGN PRINCIPLES are applicable to all types and scales of development. Although this guide focuses in particular on small to medium sized housing developments, as these account for much of the development taking place in the District, the principles outlined can be applied to other forms of new development.

DESIGN PRINCIPLES supports and supplements the Council's design and planning policies set out in the Breckland District Local Plan (1999), notably Policy ENV.26, and has been prepared in the light of central government guidance which encourages local authorities to promote higher standards of building design. DESIGN PRINCIPLES will be adopted as supplementary planning guidance to the Local Plan.

> key DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Defining and assessing what constitutes good building design is not an easy or straightforward task. Opinions vary on what makes for a good building or development, and judgements are often coloured by personal tastes and preferences.

To provide a means by which proposals may be assessed in a consistent and reasonably objective way, the Guide sets out 5 key design principles based on widely accepted architectural and urban design concepts. The key design principles will form the basis of the Council's design assessment of all development proposals.

The key design principles make clear the various issues the Council expects designers to take into account when drawing up proposals. Whilst designers should have regard to all of the design principles listed, it is acknowledged that the relative importance of each principle will vary according to the particular circumstances of a development. It is important to note also that the 5 principles are closely related and overlap one >

another - particular design issues will often touch on several, if not all, of the principles. In some cases, trade-offs between competing design objectives will be required

1

respect for context

New development should integrate well with its surroundings, and take full account of site features and local character. New development should be neighbourly and, where appropriate, reinforce local distinctiveness.



2

sense of place

New development should be designed to create a sense of place and identity. Particular attention should be paid to the design of spaces and places between and surrounding buildings



3

good looking buildings

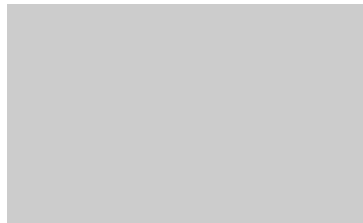
New buildings should be pleasing to the eye, soundly built and fit for their purpose. Particular attention should be paid to issues of scale and proportion, visual balance and order, architectural expression, detailing and the use of external materials.



4

sustainable construction

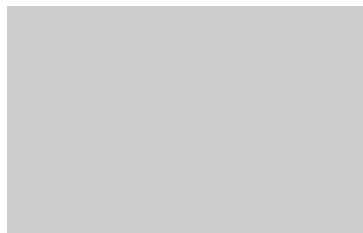
New developments should be based on established principles of sustainable construction. Particular attention should be reducing energy consumption.



5

a safe and healthy environment

New developments should create places where people feel safe and that are easily accessible to all.



> using DESIGN PRINCIPLES

DESIGN PRINCIPLES is not a design guide in the traditional sense. It does not provide lists of design 'do's and don'ts', and is not intended to be used as a 'design rule book'. DESIGN PRINCIPLES does not attempt to tell the reader how to design. Applying rigid design standards can stifle creativity and result in bland and unimaginative developments. Innovation and imagination are essential ingredients in any recipe for good design.

Instead of prescribing model development types or architectural styles, DESIGN PRINCIPLES identifies five key design principles it expects new development to follow. These design principles are based on widely accepted urban design and planning concepts. Each key design principle is considered and illustrated in turn in the sections that follow this introduction

It is for the designer and developer, in partnership with the Council, to decide how the qualities set out in the key design principles are to be achieved, given the particular circumstances of each development. This approach provides flexibility, allows site-specific design, and acknowledges that there will often be more than one appropriate design solution for a given proposal. It is not, however, an approach rooted in a philosophy of 'anything goes'. Proposals will be examined rigorously by the Council, and designers will be expected to demonstrate how their proposals address the key design principles

Checklists are provided throughout DESIGN PRINCIPLES as a means of summarising the issues covered, and to allow proposals to be assessed in a consistent way. It is important, however, that the use of such lists does not make the process of design a 'tick box exercise'.

> professional advice

For anyone proposing new development, there is much to be gained by seeking out and retaining professional design advice. Designing buildings that will enhance their surroundings *and* meet the needs of their users, requires a blend of aesthetic judgement, technical knowledge and confidence, together with an ability to reconcile the sometimes conflicting demands of the developer, local authority, local residents and other interested parties. For this reason potential applicants for planning permission are strongly advised to employ the services of a qualified architect or other professional designer. Making time and resources available for design at the

outset of a building project is essential. Cutting back on the time and money spent on initial design work, or not even employing a professional designer at all, will generally prove to be a false economy, particularly when the long-term costs are considered. Measured over their lifetime, well-designed

buildings need not cost more than poorly designed ones. They may even cost less by reducing running and maintenance costs, and by providing more flexible accommodation, thus avoiding the need for costly adaptations to extend the useful life of the building.

The input of a designer need not necessarily be confined to the initial preparation of plans. Good plans do not always result in successful developments. Appropriate supervision and input from a designer during construction, together with a team of competent builders and contractors, can help to ensure that projects are transferred successfully from drawing to reality.

NOTES

1 Urban Design Compendium

2 Planning Policy Guidance
Note 1 (PPG 1)

