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DESIGN PRINCIPLE 3

GOOD LOOKING BUILDINGS

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

key design issues

- **the quality of the architectural design of buildings can have a significant impact on the visual character of a development and its relationship to its surroundings**
- **what matters most is the quality of the design and the attention paid in its execution, not the architectural style adopted.**

> good looking buildings

Once the overall shape of a development or individual building has been determined, its appearance can be developed further through the choice of materials, architectural detailing, and the arrangement of doors and windows on individual elevations. Decisions about how buildings are to be detailed can have a considerable impact on the final appearance of a development, and hence on the visual relationship between a development and its surroundings. Good elevational design can ensure that new developments reinforce local character, create a sense of place and add visual interest to their surroundings.

What matters most is the quality of the design and the attention to detail paid in its execution, not the architectural style adopted. *'Traditional materials and design ideas can be used in a totally modern way. Conversely, new materials and cutting-edge construction technologies can be deployed to create a comfortable human scale architecture and, where appropriate, reflect traditional styles.'* [1]

It is important when considering the detailed design of a development not to become caught up with issues of architectural style, or debates about 'traditional' versus 'modern' design. In order to provide a rational basis for assessment of architectural design, DESIGN PRINCIPLES identifies a number of qualities that new buildings will be expected have, irrespective of the architectural style adopted.

Buildings should be good looking, with elevations that are well ordered and visually balanced. The various elements of a building – its plan form, shape, size, massing and details – should be resolved into a composition that is visually coherent and pleasing to the eye. Buildings should have a human scale. External materials should be robust and weather gracefully, and be appropriately detailed.

> order and balance

New buildings should have proportions that are visually pleasing in themselves and which relate well to the form of distinctive local buildings. Buildings with well proportioned and ordered elevations tend to have a sense of repose and appear at ease with themselves. Where this is not achieved, buildings can ungainly and ill at ease with their surroundings.

Visual order and balance can be achieved by the careful manipulation of the scale and proportions of a building, and through the use of repetition and various geometrical patterns.

For many centuries, architects have used various systems of proportion as an aid to design. Such systems identify certain 'ideal' proportions, like the golden rectangle and the Fibonacci series, and can be used to determine the overall shape of elevations and the proportions of door and window openings within them. Reference to these systems of proportion can help designers working a range of architectural styles to produce buildings with a strong sense of order and proportions that are pleasing to the eye. The basic proportions of a building – its height, width and depth – can all be varied to suit the local context and create visually attractive developments. Particular attention should be paid to the shape of the principal elevation of buildings, and the proportions of the doors and

windows within them. The basic proportions of a building can be developed further by the addition of projecting wings, lean-tos, bay and oriel windows and the like. Considered arrangement of these features can create lively and interesting elevations,

Symmetry is often used in the design of buildings to create a sense of visual order and balance. The traditional 3 bay house with central door and windows either side is a good example of this.

Asymmetrical arrangements of openings can also be used by designers to good effect. Asymmetrical compositions may be used to create eye-catching and dramatic elevations, and to provide contrast with formal arrangements. Informal compositions can also be employed to evoke successfully the character of rural, vernacular buildings, with their more relaxed arrangement of openings. Almost but not quite symmetrical arrangements can be rather disturbing visually.

Repetition of fenestration patterns can be used effectively to give elevations a sense of order. Arranging doors and windows in a grid like fashion, one above another, or following repeating bays or frames, gives elevations a well ordered appearance that is pleasing to the eye. In contrast, where doors and windows are seemingly placed at random the resulting elevations can be unsettling to the eye.

Another means by which visual balance can be achieved is by ensuring that the overall directional emphasis of an elevation is balanced by the directional emphasis of the openings within it. Thus, on a typical elevation with horizontal emphasis, vertically proportioned openings will give a sense of visual balance. Conversely, on an elevation with a strong vertical emphasis, horizontally shaped openings may be used to give visual balance.

> human scale

All new buildings should be designed to have a human scale. This is of particular importance in residential development. The detailed design of the elevations of a building can do much to give it a human scale.

The use of door and window openings that reflect human proportions is critical to achieving a comfortable human scale. The effect created can be reinforced by the addition of small scale elements to a façade like porches and bay windows.

Where large openings are required, perhaps in a commercial building, these may be subdivided to give some sense of human scale. On residential properties, garage door openings can appear out of scale with domestic doors and windows. In order that houses do not lose their human scale, garage door openings should, whenever possible, be located apart from the principal elevations.

Dividing the elevation of a building horizontally to highlight internal floor levels can help to give a sense of human scale. This can be achieved by the use of contrasting materials.

> detail

The way that a building's elevations are detailed can have a significant effect on the overall appearance of a development. Detail can add visual richness and interest to buildings, help to articulate the various elements of a design and give expression to the structure of a building and its materials. The way in which the junctions of different elements of buildings—walls/ roofs/windows—are handled is particularly important Appropriate detailing gives buildings a well finished appearance and can help to resolve the various parts of a scheme into a cohesive whole. It is important however that buildings are not overburdened with detail. This can create a fussy appearance which is rarely successful. Detailing tends to work best where it arises directly from functional necessity or from the nature of the materials used, rather than being applied as a afterthought to add decoration to an otherwise bland building.

> expression

Architectural expression can take a variety of forms, highlighting the use and importance of a building, and its construction. If approached in a lively and imaginative way, architectural expression offers many opportunities to add visual richness and meaning to places.

expressing use

Buildings may be designed to express their use or importance. As an example, a building used on the ground floor as a shop, with residential accommodation in its upper floors, might express this use with large street level display windows and smaller domestic scale openings above. Buildings can also be designed to express their importance. Applying this principle locally significant buildings like schools,village halls, doctors' surgeries and libraries can be designed to be distinctive and eye-catching. These forms of architectural expression adds variety to our surroundings, and helps us to distinguish one building from another and one place from the next.

The design of the elevations of a building can also give clues about its internal layout, and in so doing make it easier for people to find their way around. In this respect identifying clearly a building's entrance is often critical. Buildings can also be designed so that some of the activities within them are revealed to the outside world, helping to add visual interest and vitality to streets and places. Provided that an appropriate level of privacy is maintained, this form of architectural expression also helps to promote casual surveillance of both the street and the building, making places safer.

expressing structure

The elevations of a building may be designed to express clearly its structural form and the nature of its external materials. For instance, the solidity of a brick building may be emphasized by spacing window openings widely, and positioning them well away from corners. Recessing windows and doors in their openings, and adding projecting plinths, has a similar effect by highlighting the thickness of walls.

In contrast, the structure of a steel or timber framed building can be expressed by the use of larger areas of glazing reflecting the structural bays of the building and the relatively slender supporting structure. Some buildings of contemporary design express their form of construction directly by exposing parts of the structure of the building.

In some cases designers may wish to create a sense of visual tension or drama by concealing the structure and defying structural conventions. Designing windows to wrap around the corner of a building is an example of this.

DESIGN CHECKLIST

- Are the elevations of proposed buildings well ordered?
- Are doors, windows and other elevational features arranged to achieve a sense of visual balance?
- Do elevations have a sense of human scale?
- Do elevations incorporate an appropriate level of detail to ensure a well-finished appearance?
- Have forms of architectural expression been employed to create lively and interesting buildings?