

Design and Landscape

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17.1 Introduction

- 17.1.1** The importance of good design in securing high quality development is widely recognised. Design is not just about visual appearance and function: it is about a whole range of social, economic and environmental considerations, which together are a major contributor to quality of life.
- 17.1.2** One of the objectives of this Plan is to raise the standards and quality of the layout and design of new development. The District Council is strongly committed to promoting good design in new developments and to improving the quality of public spaces. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development and can contribute positively to making places better for people. The way in which places and the buildings within them are designed is fundamental not only to creating environments that communities value, but also to ensuring that the use of resources and the environmental impact of new development is reduced.
- 17.1.3** Good design can encourage healthy lifestyles by encouraging movement on foot and by bicycle. It can also enhance local distinctiveness, promote the vitality of the local economy, facilitate community cohesion by enabling social interaction in secure public spaces and incorporate multi-functional Green Infrastructure networks. In summary, good design can contribute towards creating attractive and safe places where people want to live, work, and visit.

17.2 Design Objectives

- 17.2.1** To achieve high quality design, there are several intrinsic sustainable development objectives that should be understood by applicants to inform the design of new development. These are to:
1. Respect, improve and enhance the existing surrounding environment;
 2. Respond to existing patterns of development and the local context;
 3. Be attractive in appearance but receptive to original design and innovation in construction techniques, design and technologies;
 4. Be usable, in terms of accessibility, legibility and be well-connected;
 5. Be adaptable and flexible to the needs of the occupiers now and in the future;
 6. Be socially inclusive, catering for the current and changing needs of the district's population;
 7. Discourage crime and anti-social behaviour;
 8. Encourage good health and well-being;
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9. Incorporate measures to mitigate and adapt against the effects of climate change;
10. Incorporate water management and sustainable urban drainage, planting and landscaping into the overall design, including through the creation of adequate private and public amenity space and green infrastructure;
11. Incorporate the good practice recommendations of British Standard 5837 (2012): Trees in relation to design, demolition and construction; and
12. Incorporate appropriate Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Assessments and Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments in the consideration of location and design of new development.

17.3 Sustainable Design

- 17.3.1** There are many industry examples, toolkits, guidance documents and best practice available that provide sources of information on specific aspects on sustainable design.
- 17.3.2** Building Futures is a Hertfordshire guide to promoting sustainability in development. It includes an interactive Sustainable Design Toolkit, which contains design guidance for six different types of development ranging from householder extensions through to large and mixed-use development:
1. Household extension
 2. New dwellings
 3. Multi-residential (e.g. care homes)
 4. Education & Health
 5. Commercial & Industrial
 6. Large & Mixed-use
- 17.3.3** The Toolkit has been created to help those who prepare and assess development proposals in Hertfordshire to better understand the principles of sustainable design and consider how best they can be applied to a specific scheme and site. Using a virtual townscape, the Toolkit aims to provoke thought and inform decisions on the design and build of new development schemes in Hertfordshire. It does this by providing a simple framework of questions, best practice guidance and further information on sustainable design.
- 17.3.4** Users of the Toolkit can choose from any of the six development types to navigate a wealth of sustainable design guidance on issues such as climate change, water, materials and safety.

Building Futures is an interactive Website which can be viewed at:
www.hertslink.org/buildingfutures

- 17.3.5** The Government conducted a Housing Standards review in 2015, which integrated some voluntary standards into Building Regulations and created a suite of optional national housing standards that planning authorities can choose to include in local plans. Building Regulations change over time, while sustainable design and technology improves and becomes more viable as they become more established. East Herts Council aspires for all development to exceed national standards and Building Regulations where possible and developments will be expected to utilise the best available sustainable design and technology as possible.
- 17.3.6** The Building Research Establishment has established a new Home Quality Mark to replace Building for Life which was revoked in the National Standards review 2015. The Home Quality Mark is an independent assessment of the home's quality in terms of its contribution to the occupant's health and wellbeing, cost to maintain and energy efficiency for example. It is a voluntary standard which demonstrates that design and construction exceeds that required by Building Regulations and can be used as a tool when marketing and buying properties and may be used as a benchmark for proposals.

The Home Quality Mark guidance can be viewed at: www.homequalitymark.com/standard

17.4 Planning Applications

- 17.4.1** Development proposals can often be controversial, therefore it is important that appropriate appraisals are undertaken to inform the site planning, layout and design process, and that local communities and stakeholders are engaged throughout. The District Council expects a high standard of design in new development. To achieve this, applicants should ensure:
1. A comprehensive design process has been carried out including: a site and context appraisal and assessment of relevant policies; involvement with the local community; and the design of the development scheme based on assessment, involvement, and evaluation of information collected;
 2. That in the design of the scheme there should be clear evidence that design principles based on the sustainable development objectives set out above have been followed, understood and integrated within the constraints of the development proposal. It is essential that skilled architects, landscape architects and drainage engineers are involved in the early stages of any development proposal, to ensure that the potential of any site can be maximised;
 3. That where necessary, a Design and Access Statement has been completed and accompanies the application. The statement should make it clear how the proposal has integrated sustainable design principles into the scheme. The Statement should clearly justify the proposal by explaining how it will create safe, accessible, vibrant and sustainable development which respects its

landscape setting and complies with British Standard 5837 (2012). Applicants will be encouraged to use the Building Futures Sustainable Design Toolkit and the Home Quality Mark within their Design and Access Statements.

17.5 Design Codes

- 17.5.1** A Design Code is a set of specific rules or requirements to guide the physical development of a site or place. The aim of design coding is to provide clarity as to what constitutes acceptable design quality and thereby a level of certainty for developers and the local community alike that can help to accelerate the delivery of good quality new development.
- 17.5.2** The District Council will consider using Design Codes where they will help to deliver high quality outcomes on particular sites/areas.
- 17.5.3** Where applicable, other forms of design guidance such as Neighbourhood Plans and Parish Design Guides may also be applied.

17.6 Design Reviews

- 17.6.1** The publication of the NPPF has re-iterated and reinforced the role of Design Reviews. Where appropriate the District Council will ensure that local design review arrangements are in place to provide assessment and support to ensure high standards of design.
- 17.6.2** The Hertfordshire Design Review Panel, has been set up to help planners, developers and designers realise the full potential of development schemes, providing a resource to support the delivery of high quality, sustainable design for those bringing forward development proposals.
- 17.6.3** The majority of schemes brought forward for review would be at the pre-application stage, i.e. at the early design stage. They would normally be major schemes as defined by their scale and nature, or which have a significant impact on the character of Hertfordshire's landscape, settlements and built form. Schemes submitted for review may include proposals for new housing, commercial development, infrastructure or community facilities (e.g. schools) as well as public realm and open space enhancement schemes.

17.7 Local Character and Amenity

- 17.7.1** Many features contribute to East Hertfordshire's character, including its historic environment, the landscape and the pattern of towns and villages, rivers and open spaces. This context makes the district a very attractive and desirable place to live.
- 17.7.2** Buildings and landscapes that demonstrate a distinct character and are aesthetically pleasing, contribute greatly to the success of a place. Some development proposals, (especially schemes involving a number of dwellings) can be bland and generic. However, if a development proposal is based on a sensitive understanding of site

and context, it can exhibit a distinct character and identity while also belonging to the wider locality. For example, development in proximity to water spaces should respond to and incorporate the water space in the design to add to the character of development. Therefore successful development should respond to locally distinctive patterns of development, building methods and detailing, landscape and history.

17.7.3 If development is to be successfully integrated within the existing environment then scale is an important design element. When designing to the local character of building forms, patterns of development and the natural environment, the scale of new development should:

1. Avoid obscuring important views, vistas and skylines as established through a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment;
2. Ensure the height and massing does not interrupt the rhythm of an existing building/roof line and overall streetscape, or detract from the local and wider area's character;
3. Respect the existing scale in the detailing and composition of elements such as windows, doors etc; and
4. Have regard for the principal users of development schemes so that buildings and infrastructure are scaled for their maximum benefit and enhance their experience of the space.
5. Have regard to the recommendations for managing change within a landscape as set out in the Landscape Character Assessment Supplementary Planning Document (2007).

17.7.4 Taller buildings are often more suited to key locations such as on corners, along principal routes, the end of vistas or around parks.

17.7.5 The layout, form, building details and massing of a development will have a great impact on a locality, and the opportunity to enhance, add variety and local distinctiveness. Layouts should observe good urban design principles, with a clear sense of public and private frontages and buildings, positively addressing public routes within and around a site. The layout and alignment of built form, plots and blocks should respect and be well integrated within the grain of the wider townscape and have regard to the Manual for Streets 2 (2010), which is a guidance document produced by the Chartered Institute for Highways and Transportation.

The Manual for Streets 2 can be downloaded from the CIHT website at:
<http://www.ciht.org.uk>

Landscape Character

- 17.7.6** Landscape is formed by many factors, including the underlying soils, climate, habitats and human influence, both past and present. Planning policy provides an important framework within which to protect and manage change within a landscape.
- 17.7.7** The rural landscape is of great significance to the character of East Herts. The district has a rich landscape of open fields and parklands shaped by river valleys and arable plateaux. Woodland accounts for 9.8% of total land cover, 11% of which is recorded by the Woodland Trust as being Ancient Woodland under threat. Hedgerows are also an important feature throughout Hertfordshire, reflecting the historic enclosure of agricultural fields and defining land ownership boundaries. Many hedgerows throughout the district are considered as being ‘important’ (Hedgerows Legislation, 1997) and are key elements of green corridors, contributing towards wider ecological networks.

The Woodland Trust’s ‘Woodland Indicators by Local Authority (Non-unitary district councils), July 2016’ can be found at: <http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/publications/>

- 17.7.8** There are diverse landscape character areas and settlement patterns in the district which are assessed in the Council’s Landscape Character Assessment Supplementary Planning Document (September 2007). The document provides a structured evaluation of these landscapes, a landscape strategy and guidelines for strengthening, reinforcing, improving, reconstructing, conserving and restoring the character of each area. The document also provides a framework for assessing planning applications.
- 17.7.9** Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments and Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Assessments should be submitted with planning applications where appropriate, detailing how these have informed the proposal, including mitigation where necessary.

The Landscape Character Assessment Supplementary Planning Document (2007, or as amended) can be viewed and downloaded at: www.eastherts.gov.uk/landscapecharacterspd

Policy DES1 Landscape Character

I. Development proposals must demonstrate how they conserve, enhance or strengthen the character and distinctive features of the district’s landscape. For major applications, or applications where there is a potential adverse impact on landscape character, a

Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment and/or Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Assessment should be provided to ensure that impacts, mitigation and enhancement opportunities are appropriately addressed.

II. In exceptional circumstances, where damage to landscape character is unavoidable and justified by other material considerations, appropriate mitigation measures will be sought.

III. Where an area is identified in the Council's latest Landscape Character Assessment SPD this will be used to inform consideration of development proposals.

Landscaping

- 17.7.10** Landscape issues must be regarded as an integral part of the development process. Careful and early consideration of design issues and the provision of adequate landscape information can help to avoid delays at a later stage. In assessing the landscape implications of planning applications the site context, proposed layout, future uses and maintenance all need to be taken into account and detailed in a Design and Access Statement.
- 17.7.11** The Council will not permit schemes that result in the net loss of landscape features of visual and biodiversity value, and all opportunities for new planting and habitat creation should be fully explored. In exceptional circumstances, where development would result in the loss of landscape features, appropriate compensatory planting or habitat creation will be sought. Replacement planting should consist of mature plants and species that have been carefully chosen based on their suitability for the conditions of the site and the local landscape character. Native species should be used where appropriate, particularly along rivers and their associated buffer zones, paying particular attention to the avoidance of invasive species. It is important that such planting schemes are monitored over time and action is taken to ensure agreed landscaping plans are fulfilled.
- 17.7.12** Trees and hedgerows form an important part of our environment and, in the delivery of sustainable development, the retention and planting of new trees and hedgerows is crucial. Trees contribute to the amenity of the landscape and townscape, add maturity to new developments, make places more attractive and help soften the built environment. They also contribute to storm-water management, provide shading and improve air quality.
- 17.7.13** Advice on existing trees and hedgerows, new planting and arboricultural constraints can be found in British Standard 5837 (2012), compliance with which is required where there are trees on or around the site.

- 17.7.14** Some types of development would benefit from a Design Statement, while a detailed landscape and visual assessment may be needed for particularly prominent development proposals. Major proposals may be subject to formal Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) procedures. Planning Officers can advise on when these are needed and at what stage.
- 17.7.15** The Council welcomes landscape design which incorporates principles of sustainability such as use of local materials, low energy consumption for construction and maintenance, local recycling of water through surfaces which increase the permeability of the ground (such as SUDS or multifunctional green infrastructure), good pedestrian/cycle links and facilities to reduce car use.

Policy DES2 Landscaping

I. Development proposals must demonstrate how they will retain, protect and enhance existing landscape features which are of amenity and/or biodiversity value.

II. In exceptional circumstances, where losses are unavoidable and justified by other material considerations, compensatory planting or habitat creation will be sought either within or outside the development site.

Major Developments

- 17.7.16** Proposals for major development should include attractive gateway features, focal points, landmarks and vistas; should include a variation in density to reflect different parts of the site, with higher densities along major internal routes, at gateways, and around local centres, and lower densities elsewhere, as appropriate; and should incorporate distinct character areas linked by well-defined points of transition to encourage movement through the site. In particular, priority should be given to public transport modes, pedestrians and cyclists.
- 17.7.17** Such large scale proposals should be designed using a comprehensive master planning approach to the whole site within its immediate and wider context, rather than following landownership parcels.
- 17.7.18** It is also important that layouts are configured in such a way that they are easy to understand, are vibrant, well-connected, inclusive, feel safe, and have clearly defined public and private spaces. While the Government's previous guidance 'By Design: Urban Design in the Planning System' was withdrawn in March 2014, the principles within the guidance are still relevant and provide a good framework for creating attractive and sustainable developments.

Public Realm and Inclusive Design

17.7.19 Public realm refers to all publicly accessible open spaces and public and civic building facilities, publicly owned streets, pathways, water spaces, rights of way and parks. For places to work and foster sustainable communities it is important that the public realm is of a high quality, feels safe, is inclusive to all social groups, and is adaptable to the changing needs of the community. This is achievable through:

1. Careful design that prioritises and promotes walking;
2. Design that encourages cycling, including through the provision of safe and secure cycle storage;
3. The quality and materials of the hard landscaping (paving, kerbs, walls etc);
4. Uncluttered and simplified street furniture, which includes the provision of clear and legible signage where necessary, electric vehicle charging points and recycling facilities;
5. Planting (trees, grassed areas, flowers, formal, semi-formal and informal planting);
6. Green space being retained, enhanced and integrated into the design of a development scheme, which may include the creation of space for local food production or community gardens. This can help to reinforce the quality and character of a place, increase biodiversity and deliver a wide range of environmental and health and wellbeing benefits as well as foster a sense of community;
7. Lighting being integral to the design and not added at the end. Lighting schemes should be designed to prevent light pollution;
8. Incorporating inclusive design features such as play areas, seating areas or rest places, and Wi-Fi technology; and
9. Public amenity space which is of a high standard and an adequate size for the development and needs of the community. Private and public space should be considered in the process of designing buildings and places. This prevents non-specific, unused and anti-social spaces being created. The impact of any security gates on the character and appearance and on social cohesion will be considered on a case by case basis.

17.7.20 The built environment should promote independent lifestyles particularly for those with restricted mobility, such as the elderly and the disabled, and also for those with young children. ‘Lifetime Neighbourhoods’ is an established concept to build inclusive communities, ensuring that age or disability does not prevent people from accessing basic amenities, green and open spaces, cultural facilities, places to meet and relax,

and local shops and services. The layout and function of the public realm, including the provision of facilities such as toilets for public use and seating should be consciously planned into proposals at the outset.

- 17.7.21** Similarly, homes should be constructed to provide flexibility for occupants to adapt their living accommodation over time as their needs change. Policy HOU7 of the Housing Chapter sets out the Councils requirements for the construction of accessible and adaptable dwellings.

Innovation

- 17.7.22** Innovation can be incorporated into development schemes via building construction methods, building materials, and the use of new technologies (e.g. solar panels and passive ventilation). Innovation can be an important design element if it raises the standard of a development scheme by enhancing its performance, quality and aesthetics, resulting in its desirability, longevity and status. Innovation does not have to be limited to one-off developments or modern districts. If sensitive and intelligent design is utilised, new and old can co-exist without disguising one as the other.
- 17.7.23** The Council wishes to encourage good design without stifling innovation, originality or initiative. Permission will be refused for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions.

Small-scale Developments

- 17.7.24** Many developments that occur are of a small scale, often extensions to existing properties or the replacement of single dwellings. It is important that the character of the locality and the potential amenity impacts of these smaller developments respect the local character and do not significantly detract from the amenities of any neighbouring property by shadowing, loss of privacy, or similar.

Policy DES3 Design of Development

I. All development proposals, including extensions to existing buildings, must be of a high standard of design and layout to reflect and promote local distinctiveness. Proposals will be expected to:

- (a) Make the best possible use of the available land by respecting or improving upon the character of the site and the surrounding area, in terms of its scale, height, massing (volume, shape), orientation, siting, layout, density, building materials (colour, texture), landscaping, environmental assets, and design features, having due regard to the design opportunities and constraints of a site;
- (b) Incorporate homes, buildings and neighbourhoods that are flexible to future adaptation, including the changing needs of occupants and users, and changes in wider employment and social trends;

(c) Avoid significant detrimental impacts on the amenity of occupiers of neighbouring properties and land, and ensure that their environments are not harmed by noise and disturbance or by inadequate daylight, privacy or overshadowing;

(d) Encourage high quality innovative design, new technologies and construction techniques, including zero or low carbon energy and water efficient, design and sustainable construction methods;

(e) Make provision for the storage of bins and ancillary household equipment. Garages and driveways should be capable of accommodating family sized vehicles. Dwelling design and layout should make provision for electric vehicle charging points in safe and accessible locations;

(f) All new residential developments should meet the requirements of Policy HOU7, and ensure all internal rooms are of an appropriate size and dimension so that the intended function of each room can be satisfactorily achieved. All dwellings shall be identified by their square metrage.

II. Proposals must not prejudice the development opportunities of surrounding sites.

III. Development proposals which create new or have a significant impact on the public realm should:

(a) Maximise legibility and accessibility of the public realm through the layout of buildings, landmarks, use of colour, landscaping, paving, high quality public art, street furniture and infrastructure including clear and legible signposting, rest places and public toilets, in a way that maintains uncluttered spaces and enables easy navigation and movement through the space;

(b) Maximise opportunities for urban greening, for example through planting of trees and other soft landscaping wherever possible;

(c) Avoid creating 'left-over' spaces with no clear purpose or function;

(d) Ensure that long-term maintenance and management arrangements are in place for the public realm as appropriate.

(e) Engage the Hertfordshire Design Review Panel as part of the Pre-application stage and throughout the Development Management process where appropriate.

17.8 Crime and Security

17.8.1 To ensure cohesive and sustainable places it is important that a sense of personal and community safety is present within the built environment. Various measures can be designed into development schemes, which can assist in discouraging crime and anti-social behaviour. Such measures include:

1. Places with well-defined interconnected routes and spaces;
2. Public and private spaces that are clearly defined;
3. Natural surveillance, by fronting buildings, parking and play areas onto the public realm;
4. Strategically placed effective lighting; and
5. Physical access control and security hardware such as CCTV.

17.8.2 The District Council supports the ‘Secured by Design’ initiative and will expect proposals for new residential or commercial development to incorporate crime prevention measures. Applicants are also advised to consult the Hertfordshire Constabulary Architectural Liaison Officer for advice on measures to facilitate crime prevention prior to the preparation of a detailed layout. Such advice is always subject to other planning criteria and policies as well as the requirements of the Building and Fire Regulations.

17.8.3 Security features should be designed in a sensitive manner which respects the overall character of the area. On shop fronts and commercial premises the use of architectural solutions combined with the use of an internal open lattice grille is preferred.

Policy DES4 Crime and Security

I. Developments should be designed to reduce the opportunity for crime by encouraging the natural surveillance of streets, footpaths, parking and communal areas, and the creation of areas of defensible space. Such measures should not significantly compromise the provision of high quality design and landscape schemes nor be prejudicial to the existing character of the area and public amenity.

II. Security features should be designed in a sensitive manner which respects the overall character of the frontage and location, whilst maintaining an attractive street scene and minimising light pollution.

17.9 Advertisements and Signs

17.9.1 The display of advertisements and signs is subject to complex and detailed regulations. In many cases it is necessary to obtain express consent from the local planning authority.

- 17.9.2** Advertisements and signs vary greatly in their purpose. Many are essential, even mandatory. Others are provided for the purpose of direction or information, or simply to announce a particular product, service or premises. Signs are most usually displayed on the land or premises to which they relate, but are sometimes positioned some distance away.
- 17.9.3** The impact of signs varies greatly. Individually, they may cause little offence, except where they are excessively large, or are insensitively located. However, it is often the cumulative effect of signs and notices that is likely to cause the greatest visual impact and detrimental effect.
- 17.9.4** In the rural area, many signs or advertisements could appear incongruous. It is acknowledged that commercial concerns in rural areas experience difficulty in announcing their premises, but a proliferation of signs would be detrimental to the landscape, and any unnecessary sign is likely to be resisted.

Policy DES5 Advertisements and Signs

- I. The number, size, siting, illumination, design, colour and materials of advertisements or signs, displayed on or close to a building, must respect the character and appearance of the environment, and the design, scale, features, function and setting of the building.
- II. Consent will not be given for advertisements that are harmful to amenity or public safety.
- III. The display of advertisements of an inappropriate size, siting, illumination, design, colour and materials, will not be permitted.