Menu

Joint Design Guide

The value of trees
The value of biodiversity

- Movement and connectivity
  - Creating a network
  - The design of streets
  - Streets as spaces

- Space and layout
  - Framework and structure
  - Plots and amenity
  - Storage, services and utilities
  - Parking strategy and solutions
  - Open space design
  - Play space design
  - Public art

- Built form
  - General principles
  - Apartments
  - Householder extensions and outbuildings
  - Rural and low density dwellings
  - Heritage and conservation
  - Traditional shopfront design
  - Non-domestic buildings
  - Mixed use development
  - Materials, maintenance and management

- Climate and sustainability
  - Overview
  - Sustainable development
  - Reducing carbon emissions
  - Standards and certifications
  - Reducing embodied carbon

Place and setting

Menu

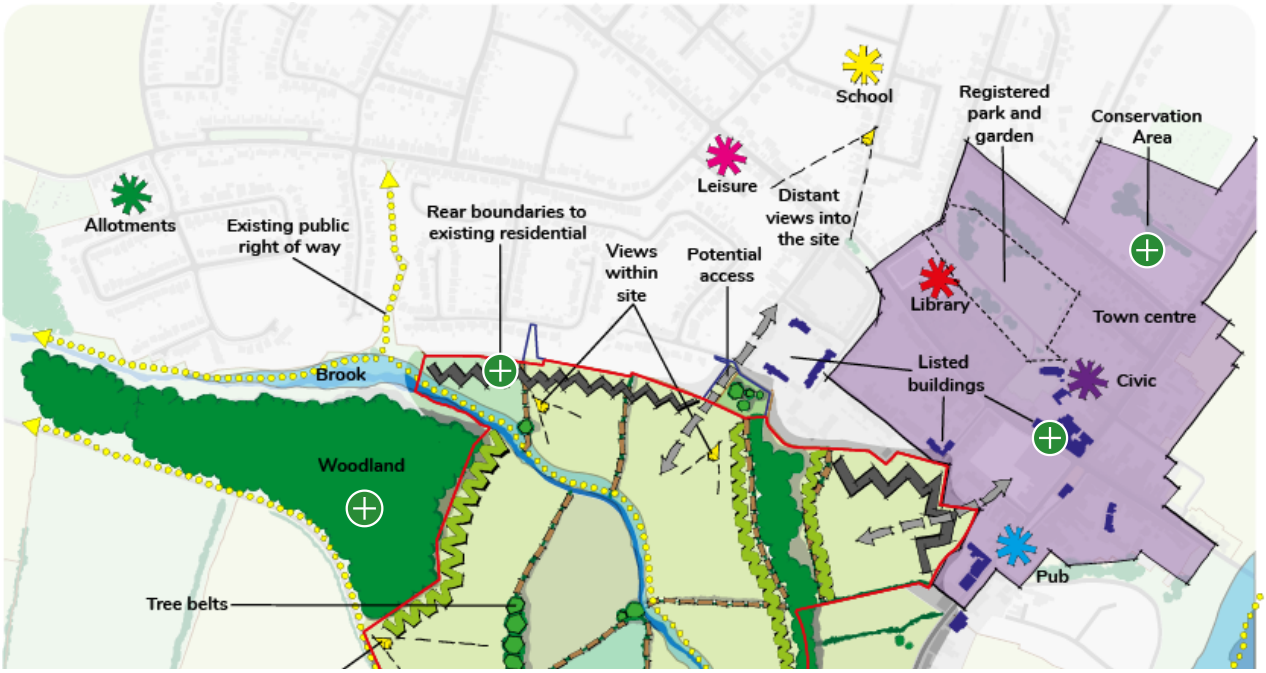
Understanding the site's features and its setting

Goal: Identify the site's features and its context

1. One of the first things to consider before designing a development is to look beyond the red line of the application site. This is the site context. To do this you should undertake a **contextual analysis**, which will then be submitted to support your pre-application enquiry or planning application.

2. A contextual analysis identifies the context within which the application site is set. This should consider the structure and history of the settlement and landscape in which it is located or relates to, the character of the landscape, biodiversity, the streets and spaces and the built form (all these elements constitute local character). The level of detail in the analysis should be proportionate to the scale and complexity of the development proposal and the sensitivity of the area.

3. Each site feature identified provides an opportunity to shape your design, even where they may initially appear to limit what you are able to achieve. Imaginative solutions to incorporate off-site and on-site features can give developments a unique character and form the basis of your design rationale. You should identify and take account of off-site and on-site features at the outset of the design process as there is rarely opportunity to successfully retrofit a design at a later stage. There should be a clear drawing trail showing how the design of the development has evolved. If the site identifies important habitat connectivity features (watercourses, tree lines, hedgerows, other swathes of linking habitat), this should influence any early framework design.



Place and setting

Menu

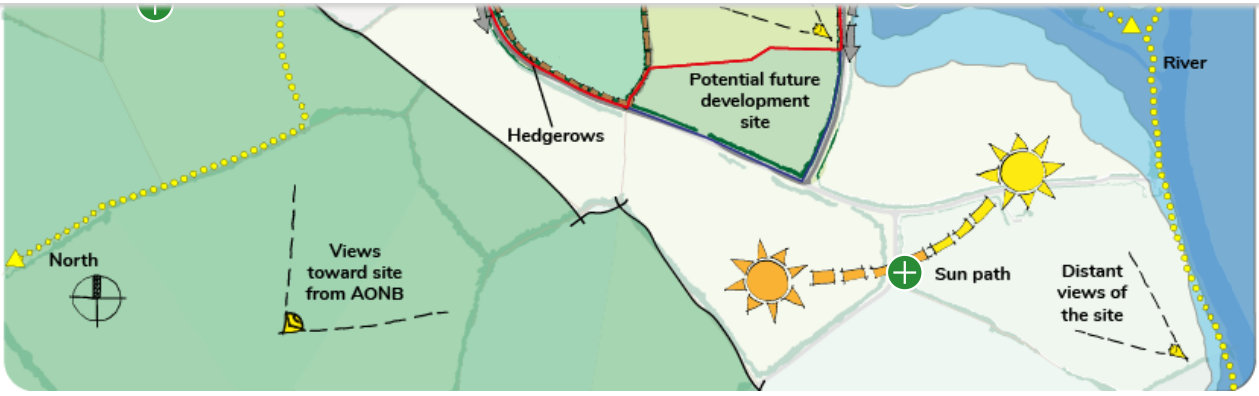


Figure 1: Illustrative example of a constraints and opportunities plan (major example)

Developing a design rationale

Goal: Use the site's features and context to shape your design

4 A design rationale is an explanation of the reasons behind the design decisions you make. Developing a design rationale is important; it is the basis for discovering workable and imaginative design solutions and provides justification for them.

5. When developing a design rationale, think about whether there is something from the site and its setting that can enhance place-identity. Landform, habitats, archaeological features, registered parks and gardens, etc., all provide elements that design can be based upon and inspired by. Focus your design rationale on creating a sense of place.

6. When thinking of creating character areas within a development, move away from notional character areas. Instead, use existing site features to inform where different character areas may naturally occur. Create a narrative around place-identity and the spaces defined by the features of the site (for example, there may be a brook or a village green on a site that has historical value which you may want to draw upon). Do not tightly define character area boundaries but make sure to have a gradual transition between them. Focus on the character of the streets/area as a way of creating attractive and defined spaces.

7. Developing a design rationale is a preliminary step within the design process. Design rationales are influenced by the overall design process, they develop and adjust based on the research and detail provided by further steps. They should be

Place and setting

Menu

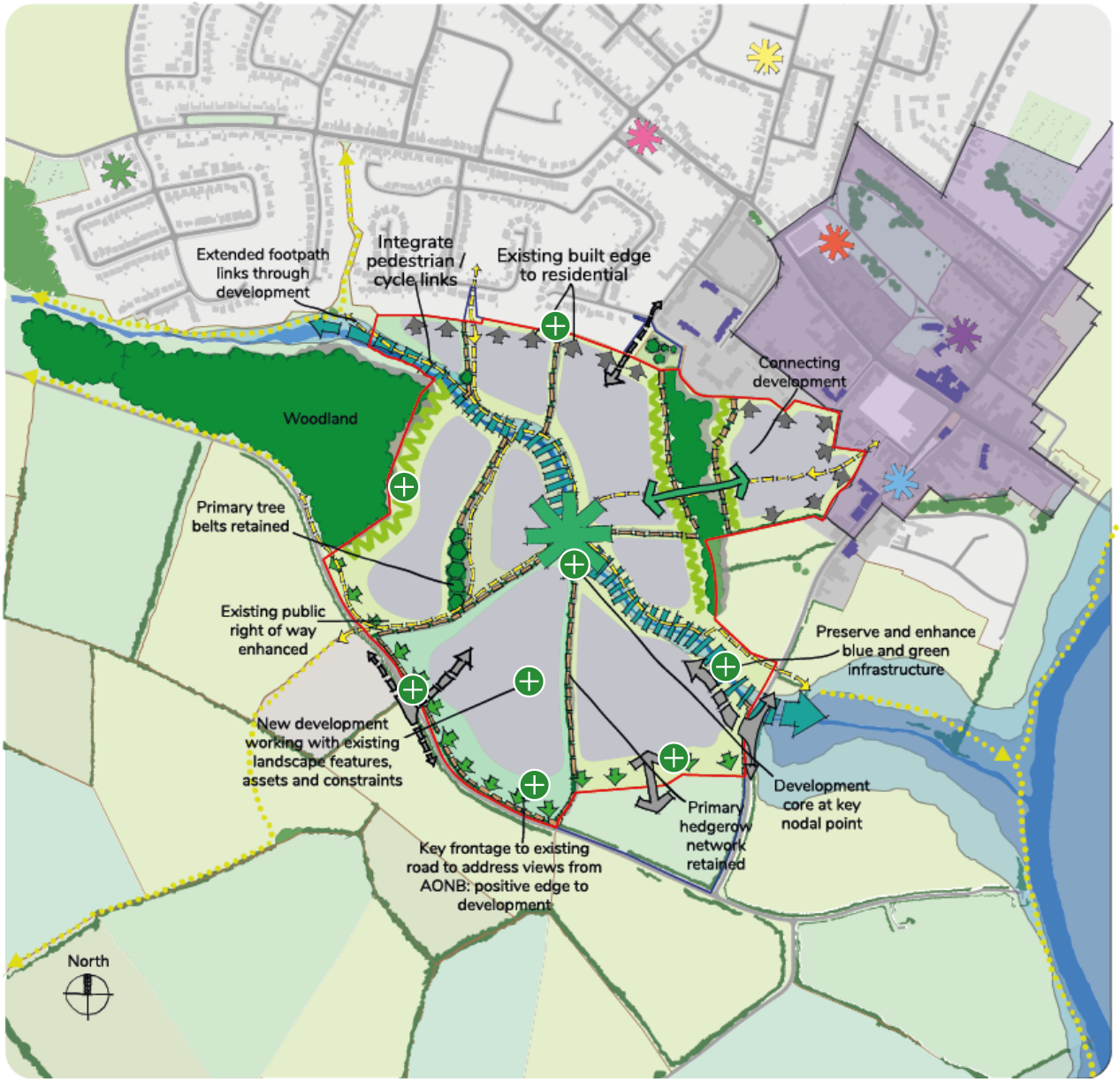


Figure 2: Develop a design rationale based around the site's features, opportunities and constraints (major example)

Steps

Inform your design:

Place and setting

Menu

built form.

Prepare technical studies including (but not limited to) surveys on landform, watercourses, trees, habitats, species, etc.

Agree the scope of a landscape and visual impact assessment/appraisal with the local authority. The assessment should be proportional to the scale of the development and the sensitivity of the site and its setting.

Communicate your design:

An **opportunities and constraints plan** with a clear key;

A **concept plan** with a clear key;

A **Framework plan.**

Support your design:

Building for a Healthy Life (2020)

South Oxfordshire District Council's Developer's Guidance on Air Quality

Vale of White Horse District Council's Developer's Guidance on Air Quality

South Oxfordshire Conservation Area Appraisals

Vale of White Horse Conservation Area Appraisals

Didcot Garden Town Masterplan (Chapter 9 A masterplan for Didcot Garden Town, 2017)

South Oxfordshire District Council Landscape Character Assessment (2017)

Place and setting

Menu

View from Uffington towards Faringdon

View from Thames river towards Culham cut

Abingdon town centre market square

Thame town centre market square

Design principles - Place and Setting

Place and setting

Menu

(which will inform your design rationale) of the wider and immediate site context has been prepared. It identifies the following both within the site and beyond the site boundary:

1.0 Existing networks of natural features, including watercourses, trees, woodland, hedgerows, green spaces, field patterns, habitats and public rights of way (footpaths, bridleways, etc.);

1.1 The landscape character and topography highlighting visually prominent areas;

1.2 Attractive and/or sensitive views and skyline (both of and from built and natural features) into, out of and within the site;

1.3 Buildings and structures of historical importance including listed buildings, associated setting and historic views, historic landscape pattern and features (historic landscape character), conservation areas, historic parks and gardens and archaeological remains;

1.4 Any statutory designations such as National Nature Reserves, AONBs, Green Belt, and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) amongst others, and non-statutory designations such as Ancient Woodland, Dark Skies, valued landscapes and Registered Battlefields, amongst others;

1.5 Potential barriers to development such as railway lines, major roads, utilities, pipelines, noise, pollution, land contamination, flooding, etc., and any resulting easements including those specified in the Local Plan(s);

1.6 The settlement structure of the site and surrounding area: this includes studying the historical development of the settlement, its townscape; structure and hierarchy of streets, spaces, facilities, existing connections (including public rights of way and cycle routes), gateways, nodes, density, plot and block sizes. Figure ground diagrams can help explain a settlement structure;

1.7 The land uses adjacent to the site and how these will impact on the design/treatment of the edges of the development - identify how each edge of the development site will address the adjacent uses;

1.8 The streets and public spaces surrounding the site, the enclosure of streets and public open spaces, the layout and form of spaces and the public and private interface;

1.9 The built character: the scale, form and massing of the built environment, treatment of building frontages and boundaries, building types and materials. This should all be included in a Character Study.

*Note: All design principles are applicable to all scales of development unless otherwise specified; *minor applications, **major applications*

Place and setting

Menu

Built form

Menu

General principles

Goal: Respect the local context whilst striving for excellence in architectural quality and sustainability.

77. South and Vale have a beautiful landscape character and a mix of towns and villages with locally distinctive buildings. However, many recent developments do not reflect that local distinctiveness and they could be anywhere in the UK. New development must create a positive character, with an identity that relates to the specific characteristics of the district.

78. The building forms used along a street should create rhythm and interest. Subtle variations in the height and width of buildings can add visual interest to the street, making it more attractive and interesting.

79. The scale of new development should be appropriate and sensitive to its context. Heights of buildings should be informed by contextual analysis. A variety of building heights along street frontages can also help to achieve this.

80. The form and massing of development can make a significant contribution to the character of a neighbourhood. The majority of traditional buildings in South and Vale, in both urban and rural areas, adopt a very consistent, simple form, with rectangular floor plans and pitched roofs. New development should adopt a simple form - but good contemporary design that respects context will be welcomed. Note that articulation of massing and roof line can help to present variety along the building frontage.

81. Note that in order to design a building to be as energy efficient (as close to zero-carbon) as possible this may result in conflict with other design principles in this Design Guide. When this occurs, be prepared to explain why this happens and explain why your solution is better.

Built form

Menu

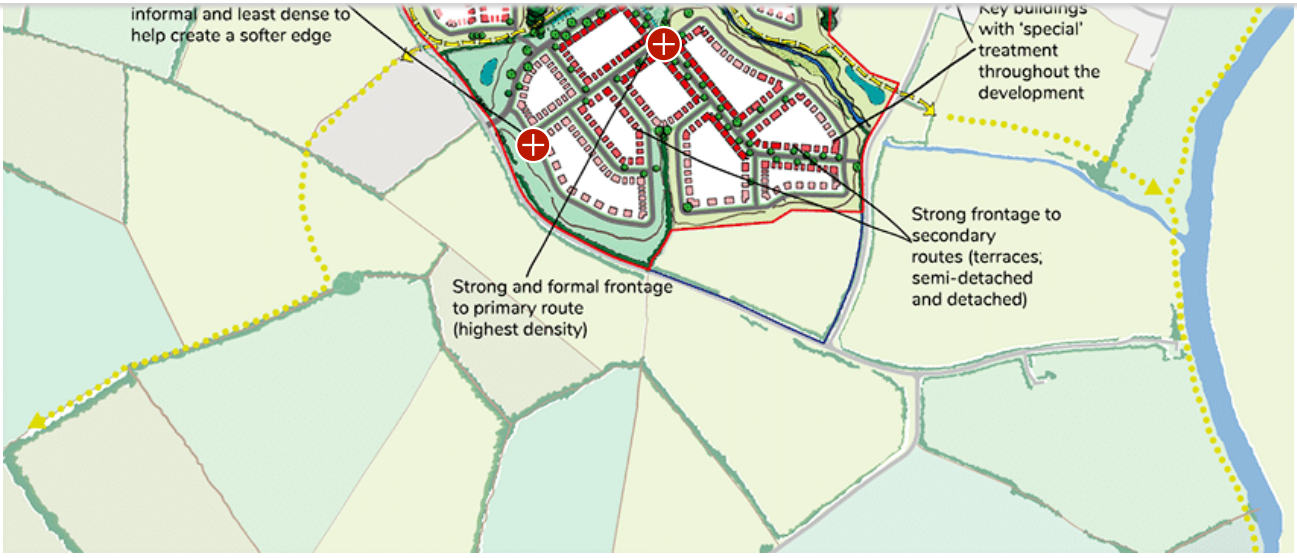
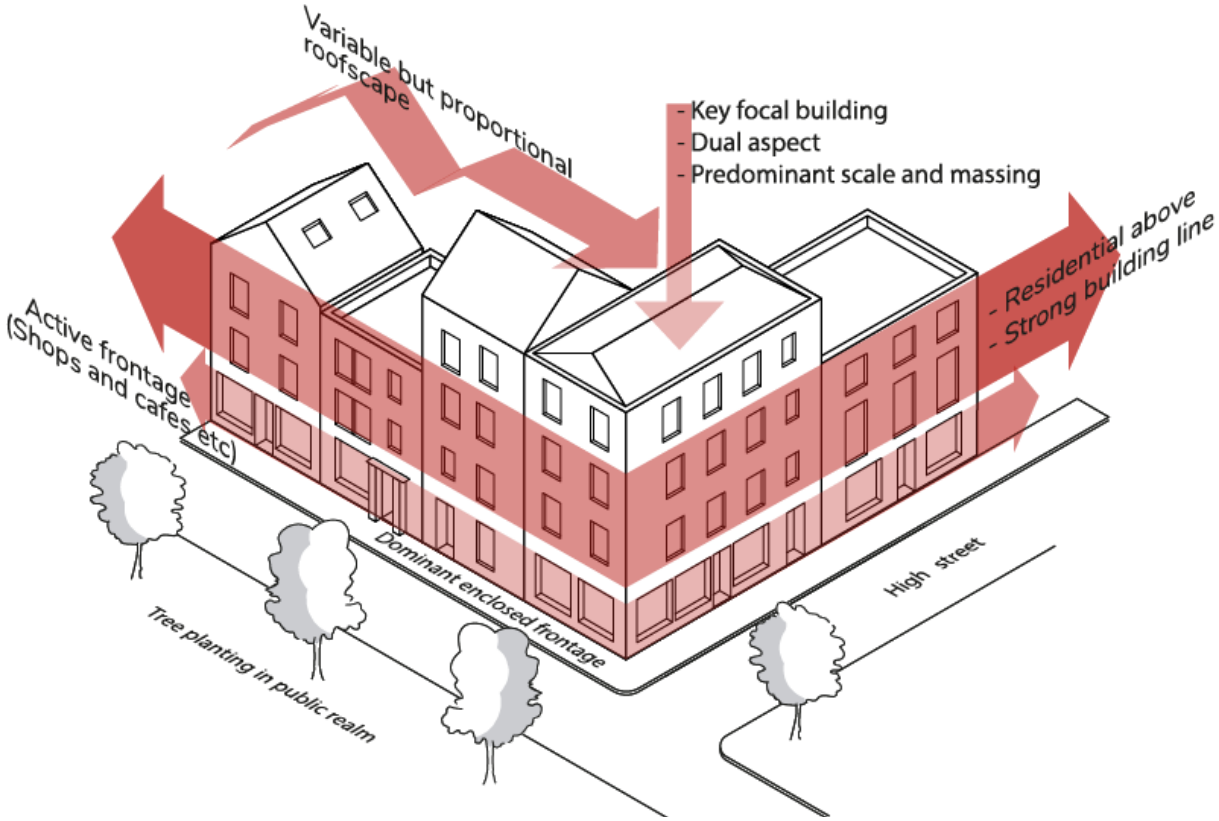


Figure 35: Establishing built form, character and identity (major example)

Town centre



Built form

Menu

Figure 36: General character and built form of town centres

Urban built form

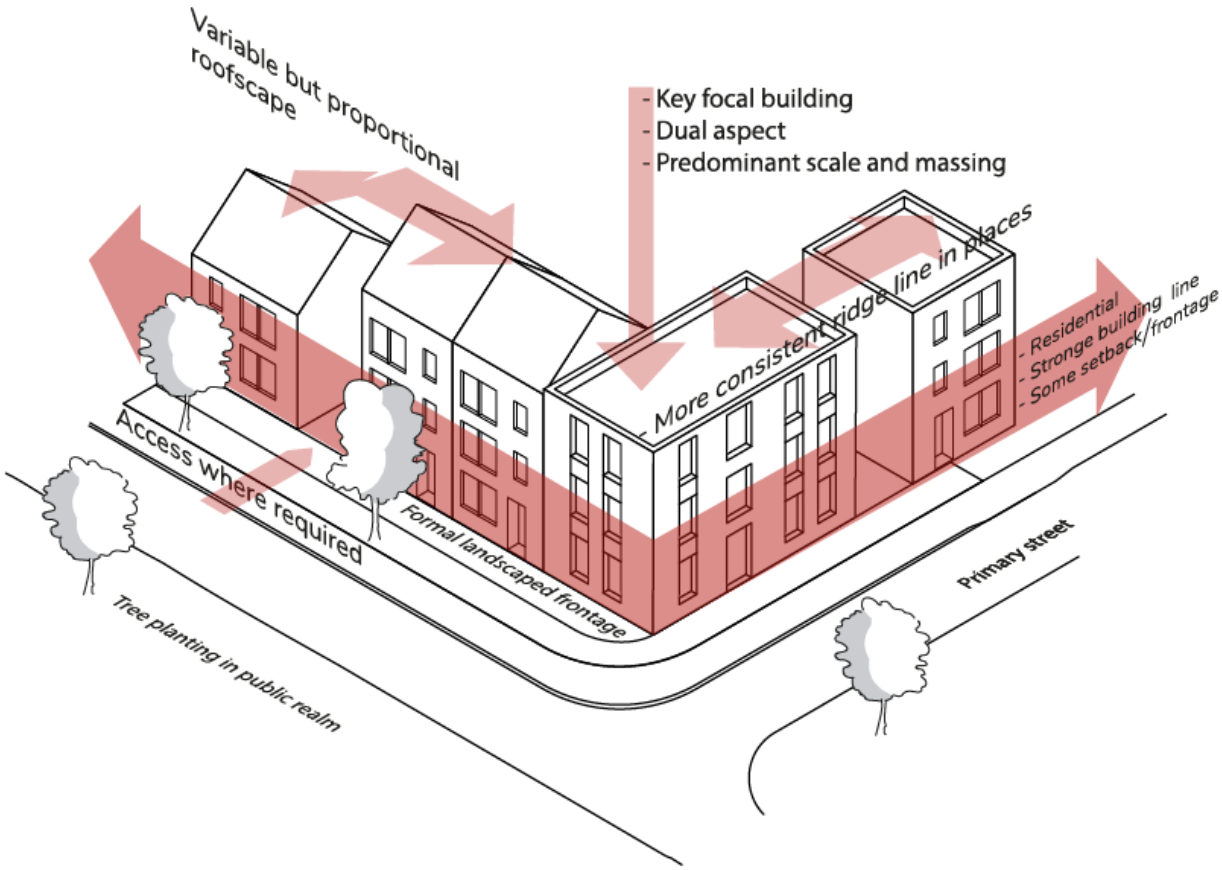


Figure 37: General character and built form of urban areas

Built form

Menu

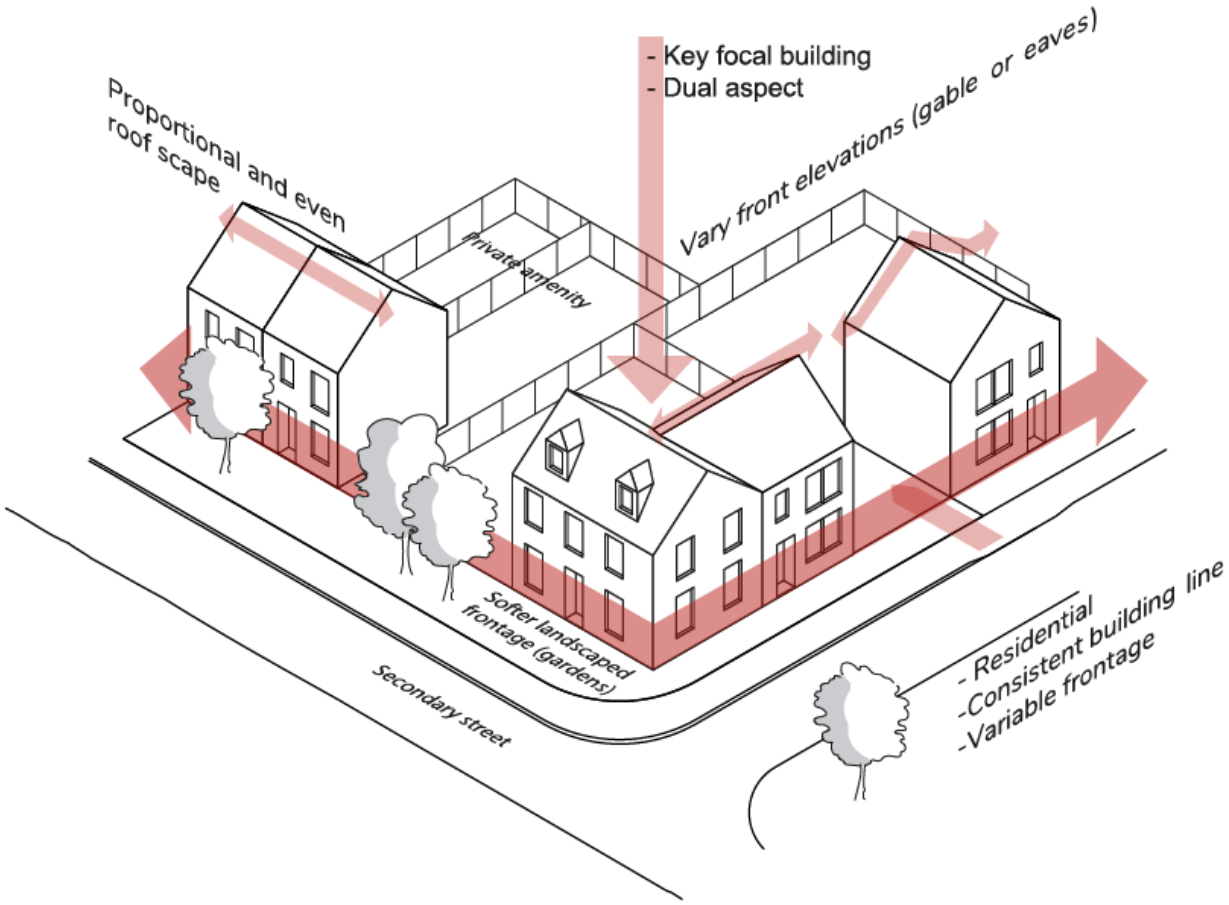
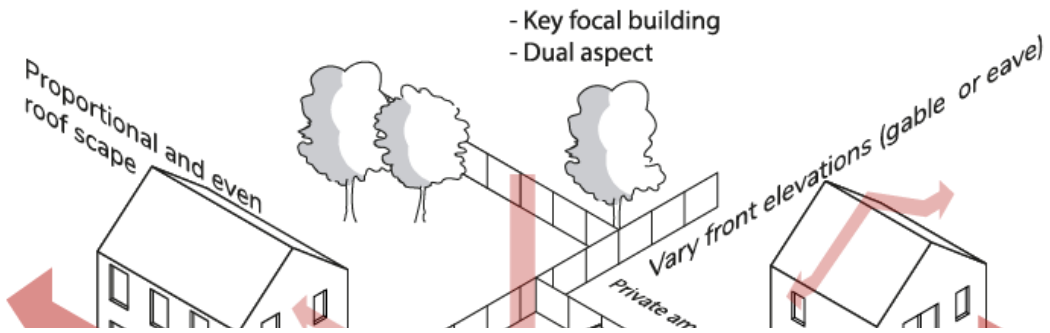


Figure 38: General character and built form of suburban areas

Lower density



Built form

Menu

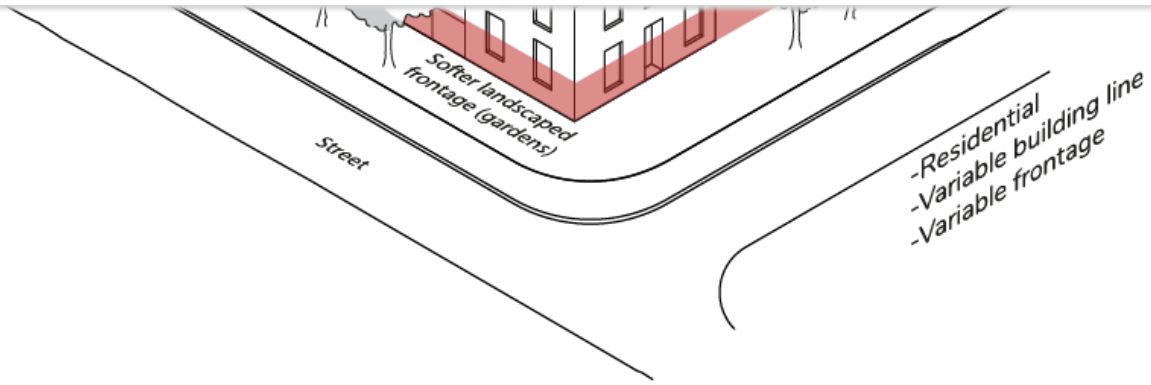


Figure 39: General character and built form of lower density areas

Steps

Inform your design:

A robust character assessment of the form and design of the buildings in the local area should be undertaken. This should focus on buildings of high-quality design in the wider context of the site and not solely on the nearest buildings to the site.

Communicate your design:

Demonstrate how the form of the buildings and their design relate to existing buildings in the local area by showing what cues have been translated into the design;

Indicate how corner plots and focal points have been addressed.

Built form

Menu

National Design Guide (2019)

National Design Code Part 1: The Coding Process (2021)

National Design Code Part 2: Guidance Notes (2021)

Building for a Healthy Life (2020)

Examples of how corner situations can be resolved with two-fronted properties, providing surveillance and active frontages in both directions (Great Western Park, Didcot)

Defining scale at key locations

Built form

Menu

An example of how local materials can be used in a contemporary way (Goring-on-Thames)

Defining enclosure (Upton, Northamptonshire)

Design principles - General built form

Ensure the scheme:

5.0 complements/responds positively to the character and local vernacular (architectural style) identified as part of the character assessment of the area. This includes wider character such as streets rhythm, walls, railing, gardens, trees, etc.;

5.1 is sensitive to its context regarding scale, massing and height. In most instances new development should adopt a simple form. An uplift in scale, massing or height may be appropriate for landmark buildings in a key location, or more complex forms, when responding to a specific character area;

5.2 works with and responds positively to the existing landscape, topography and settlement pattern, including recognising glimpsed views in and out the development and important views across the site;

5.3 breaks down larger footprint buildings to comprise a number of simple, geometric forms to reduce their apparent bulk. Floor plans that necessitate flat roof sections should be avoided;

5.4 maintains established building lines and predominant plot patterns;

5.5 has a landmark or feature building with high quality materials and good use of detailing to stand out when in prominent locations, such as gateways, key vistas, and corner plots;

5.6 avoids long, blank (windowless or without material detail) elevations when visible from an adjacent street / public realm, parking area or public space;

5.7 provides dual aspect, such as on corner plots, return materials details, fenestration and landscaping to maintain a consistent façade. Blank elevations or gable ends will not be acceptable;

Built form

Menu

5.9 has a built form designed to ensure good and direct natural passive surveillance over streets, public spaces and parking to design out and prevent crime;

5.10 has articulated ground floors of buildings with windows and doors and interesting detail (through the use of materials, datum line or façade detail) to create a development with a more human scale;

5.11 uses materials that are sustainable and have been informed by the character and appearance of the surrounding area;

5.12 has balconies (where provided) that are able to accommodate a table and chairs and space for planting/kitchen gardening;

5.13 mitigates the impact of signage (by using an appropriate scale) onto the public realm;

5.14 incorporates green and/or brown roofs/roof gardens on flat roof buildings and vertical gardens. Building design should seek to integrate biodiversity enhancements wherever possible. These could be through the provision of green walls/roofs, or faunal features (bird/bat boxes). They can be discretely incorporated into structures, or made into focal points, and will contribute to the need for development to deliver biodiversity net gain.

*Note: All design principles are applicable to all scales of development unless otherwise specified; *minor applications, **major applications*

Next Section

Built form

Menu

Rural and low density dwellings

Goal: Maintain a balance of local character and new development

117. Development in hamlets and within the open countryside is strictly controlled by government policy and local plan policy. This section is intended for rural villages and the countryside.

118. At this scale, landscape is the dominant feature with the buildings situated within the landscape or open countryside, their siting generally following the landscape for protection from the natural climate or as a by-product of a functional buildings use, i.e., agricultural buildings, estates or country houses.

119. Buildings in rural and lower density areas within South and Vale should be integrated into their landscape setting and site contexts in a sensitive manner. Buildings should not be located on ridgelines or exposed sites where the buildings will become a dominant visual feature to the detriment of the existing landscape character.

120. Applicants must demonstrate how the existing landscape and topography of a site has been considered from the outset of the design process as an integral part of any proposal.

121. Local character plays a critical role in the design process of development in rural and low-density areas. A contextual analysis should identify the local character of the development context in relation to the proposed design. The analysis should identify the scale, form, massing, architectural vernacular and materiality in and around the development's locality.

122. All development is expected to respect and incorporate the local character without being, pastiche or an overly simplified expression of the local character.

123. A sensitive and balanced approach should be taken when incorporating contemporary architectural designs. Applicants should include and integrate architectural features and materials of the local characters vernacular and material.

Built form

Menu

Figure 48: Identify local character and features when considering development in rural areas

Steps

Inform your design:

Undertake a contextual analysis (character study) of the development context, this should:

- Identify the character and pattern of development along the street;
- Identify the prevailing materials and architectural vernacular of the street;
- Identify the immediate scale and massing of neighbouring buildings;
- Identify the current curtilage and applicable boundaries treatments;
- Provide technical surveys where necessary, i.e., Tree survey.

Built form

Menu

Communicate your design:

Provide clear site sections and or a topographical survey where applicable;

Provide a site plan clearly identifying the existing building and the proposed extension;

Provide clear elevations, all applicable floor plans and a roof plan;

Three dimensional models where applicable;

Provide clear landscape plan demonstrating the retention of exiting features and planting.

Support your design:

National Design Guide (2019)

National Design Code Part 1: The Coding Process (2021)

National Design Code Part 2: Guidance Notes (2021)

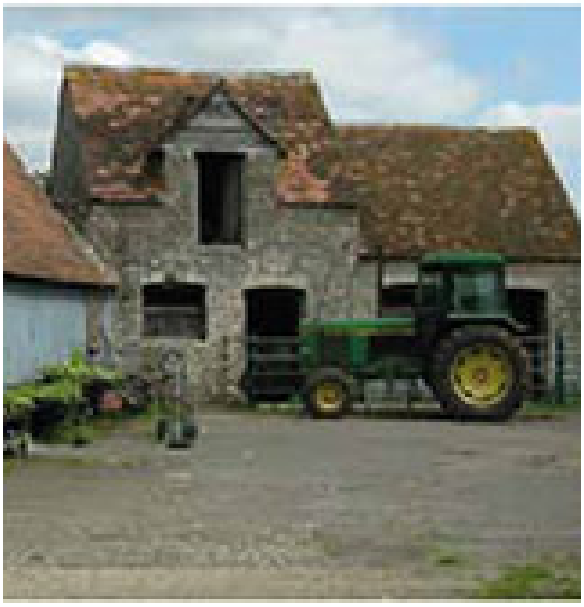
Chilterns Buildings Design Guidance

BRE guidance

Built form

Menu

Understanding rural character setting



Rural dwelling set within the landscape (top); traditional informal farmyard cluster (bottom)

Rural buildings generally conform to simple forms (top); and in a rural context access should be designed and landscaped to be informal and have a minimal impact (bottom)

Examples showing a range of landscape character and setting in rural and lower density areas

Built form

Menu

5.58 In rural lower density areas plot size should reflect the prevailing context. Visual gaps that reflect the general character of the immediate area should be retained between buildings on adjacent plots;

5.59 side boundary separation distances should take into consideration the character of the area and be reflective of surrounding plots;

5.60 In more rural and lower density locations front driveways are an acceptable solution and should be landscaped and designed in such a manner that they do not dominate the front garden or streetscape.

*Note: All design principles are applicable to all scales of development unless otherwise specified; *minor applications, **major applications*

Next Section

Built form

Menu

Materials, maintenance and management

Goal: A place that works well for everyone and will continue to work well in the future.

135. The way the building and the space between buildings will be used once the development is completed must form a critical part of the evaluation of a proposed design. This is to ensure that buildings and spaces are used appropriately, that they do not break down, the materials and landscaping do not fail and that potential issues through the use of a management or maintenance programme can be resolved by ensuring that the quality of the development as planned is protected.

136. Good design is only successful if it is built to last. Spaces and buildings that are difficult or expensive to maintain will not achieve good, long-lasting quality in their design. Proper consideration must be given at the design stage to the effects of ageing, weather and climate conditions, normal wear and tear on buildings, streets and spaces, and landscape. Inadequate maintenance can lead to an environment just as poor as one that is badly designed in the first place. You should design for easy maintenance.

137. Designing for easy maintenance takes creativity and careful thought. It is not acceptable to use a cheap material, such as tarmac, just because it is easy to replace. Equally, think carefully about how a particular material such as paving will be replaced, should it need to be. Developers/applicants may be expected to make financial contributions to maintenance as necessary.

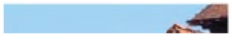
Natural Welsh slate

Brown / red handmade clay tiles

Brick-laying

Multi cladding

Brickwork detail



Built form

Menu

Figure 55: Use local materials in either a traditional or contemporary way

Hard wearing and long-lasting buff block paving (Thame)

Robust weather resistant knapped flint (Wallingford)

Provide a choice and variety of materials which should be inspired by the contextual analysis

Ensure good specifications and quality finishes

Built form

Menu

management

The new development should ensure:

5.105 the choice of materials and detailing for the streets/spaces and buildings are inspired by the contextual analysis and local vernacular;

5.106 the visual impact of materials especially roof and brick colour. Visually recessive colours are encouraged in areas visible to the wider countryside;

5.107 it presents visual interest, created by attractive detailing, high quality materials, depth and relief, shadow lines and fenestration. Changes to texture and colour should be encouraged to complement the façade articulation across the envelope of the building, not just individual elevations;

5.108 materials used are proven to be sustainable, robust and weather well. Explore case studies/examples of where these materials have been used elsewhere to support your choice, including carbon credentials;

5.109 it provides an accompanying palette of materials for streets and spaces to complement building materials. These should be easy to maintain;

5.110 the approach to maintenance is clearly set out and identifies who is responsible for all the various parts of the scheme. The list of responsibilities is likely to include the following: buildings, trees and soft landscaping, streets and open spaces, public art and sustainable drainage systems;

5.111 hard surface materials are appropriate for their intended purpose and technical requirements;

5.112 there is sufficient space to allow landscaping and planting to establish and thrive;

5.113 enough space has been provided so that existing trees will not be damaged and to avoid pressure from future residents to remove them in the future.

*Note: All design principles are applicable to all scales of development unless otherwise specified; *minor applications, **major applications*

Next Section