

High quality design

Policy DE1 – High quality design

Place and setting

- 1) All development must achieve high quality design that:
 - a) responds positively to the site and its surroundings, and reinforces local identity or establishes a distinct identity whilst not preventing innovative responses to context, demonstrated by a constraints and opportunities plan;
 - b) responds positively to the history of a site and its surroundings, and conserves and enhances historic character;
 - c) creates a distinctive sense of place through high quality townscape and landscaping that physically connects and visually integrates with its surroundings whilst avoiding coalescence with neighbouring settlements;
 - d) retain or create any attractive and/or sensitive views and skyline (both of and from built and natural features) into, out of and within the site; and
 - e) is designed to ensure that it would have no impact on the operation or capability of defence sites or assets.

Natural environment

- 2) All development must achieve high quality design that:
 - a) is landscape led, by retaining and strengthening the site's landscape features and character;
 - b) retains and enhances biodiversity and delivers biodiversity net gain in accordance with Policy NH2 (Nature recovery);
 - c) incorporates a well-defined network of green infrastructure and links to and improves access to existing green infrastructure in and within the vicinity of the development, in accordance with Policy HP6 (Green infrastructure on new developments);

- d) provides a range of high-quality green open spaces (providing for a variety of wildlife rich natural and designed landscapes and functions) that meet the needs of all users, and are safe, attractive, and accessible;
- e) avoids the use of artificial grass in residential development;
- f) uses planting to help development integrate into the landscape and to develop character and sense of place;
- g) takes opportunities to incorporate new trees in development, ensuring that new streets are tree lined and that the right trees are planted in the right places; and
- h) uses trees and soft landscaping to create character and distinction between street types and to provide traffic calming.

Movement and connectivity

- 3) All development must achieve high quality design that:
 - a) has a network of streets, paths and integrated cycleways that are safe, direct and legible, and connect with each other and the surrounding area (including to existing streets and cycle and walking paths); creating an attractive choice of routes for all users, with priority given to active travel and sustainable modes of transport utilising filtered permeability where appropriate;
 - b) provides direct pedestrian and cycle links to local services and facilities that are convenient, legible, visually attractive and follow natural desire lines;
 - c) limits the impacts of car use and encourages movement by active travel by prioritising the needs of pedestrians, cyclists and public transport users (especially those with disabilities), over the needs of motorists within the design of streets, utilising traffic calming measures where car use is present (except on roads that function as bus corridors where traffic calming measures are not suitable);
 - d) provides a clear and permeable hierarchy of streets, routes and spaces to create safe and convenient ease of movement by all users;

- e) includes accessible wayfinding / signposting to be installed to promote movement by pedestrians, cyclists and other active travel; and
- f) co-locates local services and facilities as appropriate within higher tier settlements (Tier 1 and 2) as set out in the settlement hierarchy, with good access to public transport and pedestrian and cycle links.

Space and layout

- 4) All development must achieve high quality design that:
 - a) secures a high-quality public realm that is interesting and aesthetically pleasing, and designed to support an active life for everyone with well managed and maintained public areas;
 - b) creates cohesive and walkable communities with incorporated and designed social spaces within the public realm, providing places for people to shade and shelter, rest, gather, interact, and spectate;
 - c) ensures that streets and spaces are well overlooked, incorporate active frontages and create a positive relationship between the fronts and backs of buildings;
 - d) has streets where buildings and landscaping are more visually prominent than the highway (including parking);
 - e) provides a wide range of house types and tenures that meet local and district needs;
 - f) clearly defines public and private spaces;
 - g) ensures a sufficient level of well-integrated, innovative and contemporary solutions for street furniture, car and bicycle parking (including EV charging) and external storage, including bins;
 - h) creates safe and secure communities and reduces the likelihood of crime and antisocial behaviour as well as the fear of crime itself, ensuring sufficient natural surveillance; and
 - i) incorporates public art into, and/or within the vicinity of, major developments or sites of 0.5ha or more to enhance their visual quality of the scheme and/or character of the area, and to help create or enhance a sense of identity.

Built form

5) All development must achieve high quality design that:

- a) respects the local context working with and complementing the scale, height, density, grain, massing and detailing of the surrounding area;
- b) chooses materials and detailing for the development inspired by the local context and local vernacular;
- c) uses land efficiently while respecting the existing landscape and/or townscape character;
- d) ensures the building line maintains or establishes a good street scene;
- e) does not differentiate between the design quality of market and affordable housing or the adjacent public realm;
- f) is designed to take account of possible future development in the local area, including providing links to neighbouring land where they may be needed in future;
- g) understands and addresses the needs of all potential users by ensuring that buildings and their surroundings can be accessed and used by everyone through universally accessible and inclusive design;
- h) ensures that shopfronts are in keeping with the character of the building and street scene, reflect the scale and proportion of the building in which it is set, and preserve and restore surviving historic shopfronts in a sensitive manner; and
- i) ensures that any advertisements are safe, attractive and well designed, by ensuring their location is suitable, they complement local character, use appropriate high quality materials, and avoid flashing internal or external illumination.

Climate and sustainability

6) All development must achieve high quality design that:

- a) is sustainable and resilient to climate change impacts (including increasing temperatures, wind speeds, droughts, heavy rainfall and snowfall events) in accordance with Policy CE1 (Sustainable design and construction), taking into account location, building orientation, landscaping and planting;
 - b) minimises energy consumption and carbon emissions (utilising a “fabric first” design approach in accordance with Policy CE1 (Sustainable design and construction)), and achieves an on site net zero energy balance for new buildings in accordance with Policy CE2 (Net zero carbon buildings);
 - c) demonstrates design choices have been made to reduce embodied carbon emissions in accordance with Policy CE3 (Reducing embodied carbon), including using sustainable, locally and/or ethically sourced and accredited low embodied carbon materials and/or carbon negative materials that are robust and weather well;
 - d) minimises vulnerability and improves resilience to flood risk from all sources, in accordance with Policy CE6 (Flood risk) and Policy HP6 (Green infrastructure on new developments); and
- 7) Development must also satisfy requirements of the Joint Design Guide as well as any adopted local design guides or codes (such as those within neighbourhood plans) where relevant.

10.4 Good design is a fundamental element of successful placemaking and creating sustainable development. The way we design buildings and new development has wide ranging impacts on how we feel, our sense of identity and community, as well as how we live our everyday lives. A well-designed place is somewhere that is not only attractive, but a place that can make us feel safe, where we can live, work and socialise at ease, and it can also enhance our health and well-being.

10.5 Policy DE1 (High quality design) sets out the key design objectives that we consider critical in delivering high quality, sustainable and well-designed development. These must be considered at the outset and throughout the design process, and the councils will support development that meets these objectives.

10.6 The councils have prepared a Joint Design Guide to support and add further detail to this overarching design policy, as well as other design policies set out in the Joint Local Plan. The Joint Design Guide ensures new development secures the highest design standards within the districts. New development is required to satisfy requirements of set out in the Joint Design Guide. This policy provides key design requirements under six headings that reflect the chapters of the Joint Design Guide:

- Place and Setting
- Natural Environment
- Movement and Connectivity
- Space and Layout
- Built form
- Climate and sustainability

10.7 Neighbourhood plans can also create design guides and codes for their local areas, and many across the districts have taken up this opportunity. This policy requires development to satisfy the requirements of neighbourhood plan design guides or codes where they exist.

10.8 New development should take account of all relevant guidance, including the Government's priorities for well-designed places set out in the National Design Guide⁶¹, the National Model Design Code Part 1: The Coding Process and the National Design Code Part 2: Guidance Notes⁶². It should also consider Oxfordshire County Council's Cycling Design Standards⁶³, Walking Design Standards⁶⁴ and the Street Design Guide⁶⁵. New development within the Chilterns National Landscape (formerly Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) should meet the principles set out in the Chilterns Building Design Guide⁶⁶. Other relevant guidance that should be considered includes Home's England's Building for a Healthy Life Design Code⁶⁷, and Sport England's Active Design guidance⁶⁸. Where updated versions of these documents are published, these should be taken into account.

10.9 Securing high quality design is about more than just aesthetics, but also considers how a place functions, how it lasts and adapts, and how it makes us feel. Good design creates a high-quality public realm and considers the space between buildings

⁶¹ MHCLG and DLUHC (2021) National Design Guide, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-design-guide>

⁶² MHCLG and DLUHC (2021) National Model Design Code, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-design-guide>

⁶³ Oxfordshire County Council (2017) Cycling Design Standards, available at: <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/roads-and-transport-policies-and-plans/cyclingstandards.pdf>

⁶⁴ Oxfordshire County Council (2017) Walking Design Standards, available at: <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/roads-and-transport-policies-and-plans/walkingstandards.pdf>

⁶⁵ Oxfordshire County Council (2021) Street Design Guide, available at: <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/roads-and-transport-policies-and-plans/DesignGuidePublication.pdf>

⁶⁶ Chilterns National Landscape (2010) Chilterns Building Design Guide, available at: <https://www.chilterns.org.uk/what-we-do/planning-and-development/published-advice-guidance/>

⁶⁷ Homes England (2020) Building for a Healthy Life, available at: <https://www.udg.org.uk/publications/othermanuals/building-healthy-life>

⁶⁸ Sport England (2023) Active Design Guidance, available at: <https://www.sportengland.org/guidance-and-support/facilities-and-planning/design-and-cost-guidance/active-design>

as well as the buildings themselves. It should include areas allocated to different users for different purposes, including movement, hard and soft surfaces, street furniture, lighting, signage and public art. Well-designed new development should encourage us to live more active lifestyles by creating opportunities for movement by walking and cycling. New development should also be universally accessible and designed to meet the needs of all users, including the young and elderly, disabled, parents and carers.

10.10 In the right locations, public art can play an important part in the design and place making of new developments and can make a contribution to the creation of a high quality public realm. It can make places more interesting, exciting and aesthetically pleasing. The councils will encourage and promote quality art within new developments by encouraging partnership working between professional artists and craftspeople and encouraging local participation to help establish an identity for an area. The councils will particularly support proposals that use public art to make a positive contribution to the character of an area and that is of benefit to the local community by establishing civic or corporate pride and identity, encouraging public enjoyment and engagement and/or promoting the renewal of social skills. Applicants should have regard to local public art plans where relevant.

Local character and identity

Policy DE2 – Local character and identity

- 1) All new development must be designed to reflect the positive features that make up the character and identity of the local area and should both physically and visually enhance and complement the surroundings. Contemporary and innovative proposals that will make a positive contribution to the future character of an area will be supported in appropriate locations.
- 2) All proposals for new development should be informed by a contextual analysis that demonstrates how the design:
 - a) has been informed by and responds positively to the site and its surroundings; and
 - b) reinforces place-identity by enhancing local character.

- 3) In the Chilterns National Landscape (formerly AONB), proposals for development should reflect the advice in the Chilterns Buildings Design Guide^a and associated technical notes on brick, flint and roofing materials.
- 4) In the North Wessex Downs National Landscape (formerly AONB), proposals for development should reflect the advice in the North Wessex Downs Colour Guide^b.
- 5) Development within or affecting a valued landscape must have regard to the Joint Local Plan Valued Landscape Assessment (or subsequent update) in accordance with Policy NH5 (District-valued landscapes);
- 6) Where a Character Assessment has been prepared as part of a made neighbourhood plan, a proposal must demonstrate that the positive features identified in the Assessment have been incorporated into the design of the development.
- 7) Proposals that have the potential to impact upon a Conservation Area or the setting of a Conservation Area should also take account of the relevant Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan or Character Study and demonstrate that the important features identified have been incorporated into the design of the development.

^a Chilterns Buildings Design Guide, available at: <https://www.chilterns.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/CBDGGChilternsBuildingsDesignGuide2010.pdf>

^b North Wessex Downs Colour Guide, available at: <https://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/our-work/planning/colour-study/>

10.11 Local character makes a unique and important contribution to the towns, villages and countryside that make up our districts. Character provides us with a sense of place, identity as well as an insight into history, and therefore it is crucial that new development responds sympathetically to existing character, as well as enhance it where appropriate.

10.12 When protecting local character, appropriate and sympathetic change or innovation may be acceptable, as this is often what makes future places and buildings distinctive and contributes to the continual developing character of local areas. Policy DE2 (Local character and identity) recognises this, whilst ensuring that new development in the districts responds positively to its surroundings. 'Standard' house types or the repetition of layouts and development densities should be avoided, as these most often do not reflect local character and therefore will seldom be acceptable.

10.13 Features such as tranquillity and very low levels of light pollution (also known as dark skies) can also contribute to the character of an area. Therefore, this policy should be read alongside Policy NH7 (Tranquillity) and Policy CE11 (Light pollution and dark skies), when considering features that contribute to local character and identity.

Delivering well-designed new development

Policy DE3 – Delivering well-designed new development

Masterplans

- 1) Proposals for sites allocated in the Development Plan, including sites allocated within neighbourhood plans, and major development must be accompanied by a masterplan. For outline applications, an illustrative masterplan should be submitted. In all cases, the masterplan should:

Land use

- a) identify the vision for the development, setting out a clear description of the type of place that could be created whilst building on the overall aims for the district;
- b) clearly set out the character areas and land uses proposed including the amount, scale, height and density of development, the movement and access arrangements and green infrastructure provision (including amount and position of open space), demonstrated with parameter plans;
- c) illustrate how the proposal integrates with the surrounding built, historic and natural environments, in particular maximising existing and potential movement connections and accessibility to prioritise walking, cycling and use of public transport;
- d) define a hierarchy of routes and the integration of suitable infrastructure, including for example sustainable drainage systems (SuDS), within the public realm;
- e) demonstrate a legible structure and identify key elements of townscape such as main frontages, edges, landmark buildings, key building groups and character areas;