

DESIGNGUIDE

Special Topic Sheets

VOLUME 4

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EMPLOYMENT & COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT

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Introduction



This volume covers a series of topics which apply across the district. It outlines how design considerations in these areas can help to achieve the objectives of the Local Plan.

Information and guidance provided under these special topics in most cases, refers to already established national guidance and best practice. Where this is the case additional relevant documents are referenced.

While previous volumes in this document have encouraged a bespoke approach to landscape, settlement and site there are also a series of more generic principles applicable to good placemaking and which all development should have concern for. This series of special topics are areas within the Local Plan in which design has a key role in facilitating good outcomes.

Other Volumes of this guide are applicable to the topics within this Volume and provide information on landscape character, settlement form, site situation (Volume 2) and use of design features (Volume 3) which should be cross referenced when considering the following topics.

DESIGNING FOR COMMUNITY

The design of places is concerned with the social and economic success as well as creating functional and attractive physical buildings and spaces.



Creating sustainable communities relies upon the integrated design of environments in which social values and economic function can thrive. Well designed neighbourhoods are places, where over time, communities grow stronger through the sense of belonging which is created and the long term security people can have in their place.

Beginning with the design process, every project can begin to engender ownership, sense of belonging, and community integration by involvement and engaging the community from the outset. Furthermore a design which emerges from a shared set of values and gathers consensus throughout a staged design process embodies ownership, leads to greater support for proposals among the public and politically and at its foundation can benefit from a much greater depth of local knowledge.

Careful attention to the location and prominence of a variety of community focal points around a neighbourhood (places of worship, publicly accessible buildings, shops, open spaces), whether delivered as part of a development or already existing can improve community interaction. From simple common day to day activities such as the walk to school or putting the bins out, to more individual events in the social calendar, the opportunities for people to interact can be facilitated using design. Streets should be considered as public spaces and designed to enable people interaction.



Healthy communities comprise a varied demographic. This diversity leads to widespread benefits including education, social awareness, respect for others. It can help the elderly or infirm to live independently for longer in their own home. Diversity provides the basis for a rich community memory of place, a living history and story telling which underpins the distinctiveness of a place. The design of development can pro-actively encourage a diverse community and one that is highly interactive.

High density and intimacy are characteristics of many parts of existing Mid Devon settlements. Intricate design is needed maintain privacy as well provide adequate overlooking to public areas. The internal arrangement of space within buildings can play an important role in achieving this balance.

Successful placemaking results in resilient, healthy communities, physical connections and the ability to engage in and be aware of local activities and facilities ensures that, for local trips, walking and cycling become the most convenient options.

In Mid Devon, taking the opportunity to repair and reinvigorate existing communities within towns and rural settlements is an investment in the social and economic well being across the district and the county. As communities become more functional their social capital rises in value bringing with it long term benefits in many areas.

As the Council responds to the climate emergency declaration and attends to its commitment to a zero carbon district by 2030 there will be more significant influences on patterns of living and the social consequences. Designing for community cohesion and more careful attention to the interaction of people in places and spaces can itself play an important part in addressing climate change through the development of more walkable, less car reliant, neighbourhoods and a more communal, less wasteful existence for all.

- 1 A combination of buildings and public realm create sociable places.
- 2 In many Mid Devon settlements, streets are also open spaces and encourage the free movement of all users.
- 3 Community facilities can become accidental meeting places where they are a focal point.
- 4 Privacy & overlooking need to be achieved in tight knit places.
- 5 Publicly accessible buildings can serve a landmark purpose and a social function.
- 6 Connections with, and awareness of, community groups and activities through signposting.

DESIGNING FOR HEALTH & WELL BEING

Designing for the Health and Well Being of communities requires an holistic approach. The objective is not just the absence of disease or infirmity but a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing. (World Health Organisation definition)

Evidence has shown that better quality places, lead to better health outcomes. Physical and mental health, fitness, daily comfort and quality of life have been observed and shown to be influenced by not only internal building space but urban form and the socio-economic make up of communities.

Socio-economic inequalities often correlate with unhealthy lifestyles, opportunities to exercise, awareness and capacity for healthy eating and interactivity within the immediate community day to day to facilitate a healthy mental attitude.

This Design Guide has outlined how the environment and physical considerations of the design of development can be more distinctive, however, this approach to design has a more profound and long term capability to reverse segregation, isolation and inaccessibility and provide the platform upon which grass roots prevention of future health care burdens can be established.



Allotments and communal gardens provide outdoor space for those with no private garden.

Belonging, sense of ownership and security, community and social interaction and access to outside space, including public spaces which are safe and walkable all contribute to a better, healthier environment for mind and body.

Community involvement in the design process, as outlined in Volume 1 of this guide can foster a strong sense of belonging in a place and lead to the ongoing stewardship of open space and maintenance and control over ongoing management and uses of public spaces and public buildings.

These design principles for places, which coincidentally help promote health and well being, are not new, but they can be approached from a public health perspective. Well designed



Connected places promote walking and the opportunity for recreational exercise.

Reference should be made to the ‘pocket guide’ accompanying this Design Guide document for a checklist of health & sustainability considerations for use with planning applications.

places provide good opportunities for social prescribing whereby GPs, nurses and other primary care professionals can refer people to a range of local, non-clinical services ranging from gardening to arts and sports. A mixed and diverse urban realm can offer an increasing list of referral services.

The core urban design principles of connecting places, creating a mixed, diverse community and a structure of safe streets and spaces which become public places are the basis of a healthy community, however attention to detail can also contribute hugely to people’s sense of well being through the design of uplifting and sociable spaces and buildings.

Designing buildings to maximise the use of natural daylight begins at the masterplan stage to ensure overshadowing is minimised and orientation of internal spaces is optimised. Ensuring adequate provision of private outdoor space should not be left as an after thought. Secure by design principles apply at a masterplan level and in the detailing of architecture

There are specific health challenges faced across Mid Devon for which every site should consider their small part towards a cumulative improvement: road safety, air quality, quality of living environments -particularly in rented accommodation, and space standards.

Integration of Public Health services within Local Authorities provides the opportunity for the public health consideration to be applied more readily within the planning system. This has been manifested in the principles of the Health Impact Assessment tool (HIA), in some cases influencing planning applications -assessing place’s ability to affect health outcomes for a community. In East Devon, improvements to the Cranbrook masterplan have been made on health grounds and, as a result of joint working, Cranbrook has been selected as one of NHS England’s ‘Healthy New Towns’. This opens the way for measuring the success of the place against health and well being outcomes. The subsequent 10 point guide: ‘*Putting Health into Place*’ by NHS England is available and corroborates many of the principles of this Guide.



Free events like ParkRun at Killerton happen in public spaces available for the community to use.



Formal pitches in large park spaces like in Silverton are within easy reach and well connected.

DESIGN, HOUSING DELIVERY & VIABILITY

This Design Guide aims to support the increase in effective housing delivery by helping to remove risk and uncertainty from the design process and by improving the quality of new development.

Used as indicated in Volume 1, and adopted as a common language between the authority, the community and the developer it can assist all parties in reaching consensus on design more quickly.

While the Design Guide SPD is not a policy document within the current Local Plan, it could assist any future work on the review of site allocations across the district to identify opportunities which are mutually beneficial to both housing delivery targets and the repair and enhancement of Mid Devon settlements and the contribution they make to the landscape character of the district. In this way the guide, with other previous work which is referenced throughout this guide, provides the platform by which any further site allocations can be considered, in part, in their capacity to contribute to the distinctiveness of the district as well as their contribution to housing delivery.

The connection between good placemaking and financial value and deliverability of new development is increasingly being made in national policy and guidance. Back in 2015, the RICS commissioned a piece of research from CBRE on this subject. As reported in the RICS Land Journal

(Dec 2015/Jan 2016 edition), the initial message from the research was that if developers create places that are well-planned, designed and built, people are prepared to pay more for homes there. The research looked at 5 case studies of new residential neighbourhoods or districts, varied in size and location. Land Registry data was used to reflect how the schemes had sold in relation to the local market conditions and the findings demonstrated a positive relationship between placemaking and commercial value.

Recent reviews of the planning system since the publication of the 2017 Housing White Paper have highlighted the importance of planning in creating diverse and high quality places and not just delivering houses. The importance of these factors in housing delivery was highlighted by Sir Oliver Letwin in his review of build-out rates, commissioned by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in 2017. His review built on the White Paper commitments with a specific objective of explaining the gap between housing completions and the allocated/permitted sites in areas of housing demand and making recommendations for closing that gap. The Draft Analysis, published in June 2018, concluded that large sites (those with over 1500 units) have a slower build out rate than smaller sites due, mainly, to a homogeneity of house types and tenures and limits to the rates at which the market will absorb such products. In his Final Report, published in October 2018, Letwin made a series of recommendations

including a “new set of planning rules” with financial incentives to encourage the delivery of a more diverse housing stock on large sites, raise the proportion of affordable housing, and increasing the build out rate. [Source: Independent Review of Build Out Rates: Draft Analysis, Para 4.26 (Rt Hon Sir Oliver Letwin, June 2018)]

The Raynsford Review, chaired by the Rt Hon. Nick Raynsford, was initiated by the TCPA around the same time that the Letwin Review was commissioned by government. The review aimed to start a conversation around fundamental planning reform based on the premise that near-continuous process change over the past decade has resulted in a planning system that is fragmented and fails to secure lasting progress on economic, housing, social, or environmental issues.

The Final Report of the task group was published in November 2018, and advocates a fundamental review of the planning system, covering issues as diverse and complex as the purpose of planning; the balance of power between private and public bodies; community engagement; design quality and standards; and betterment tax.

Most recently the Building Better: Building Beautiful Commission was established by the Communities Secretary Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP in 2018 with 3 primary aims:

- To promote better design and style of homes, villages, towns



and high streets, to reflect what communities want, building on the knowledge and tradition of what they know works for their area.

- To explore how new settlements can be developed with greater community consent
- To make the planning system work in support of better design and style, not against it.

The Commission’s interim report, published in July 2019 highlights the role of the planning system “Beauty first. Beauty and place making should be a collective ambition for how we move forward and a legitimate outcome of the planning system. Great weight should be placed on securing them in the urban and natural environments. This should be embedded prominently and alongside sustainable development in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), associated guidance and encouraged via ministerial statement. Local Plans should embed this national requirement locally, discovering and defining it empirically through analysis and by surveying local views on objective criteria.”

Design in all areas outlined within this guide therefore, should seek to diversify type and tenure of properties (this applies to employment and commercial uses as well as residential) and deliver high quality development. Existing settlements across Mid Devon already demonstrate huge diversity and the process outlined within Volume 2 regarding settlement form and site situations, and in Volume

3 regarding the strategic use of design features supports the specification of a diverse mix for any given site where this can be demonstrated to contribute in the ways described to the distinctiveness of the district.

Assessing the viability of a development has become more in focus in recent years as the case has been made that pressure on development to make varied financial contributions has risen. The value of design can be measured using a much wider set of criteria than the standard development appraisal provides and it should not be left to viability arguments alone to define the appropriateness of design. Social, environmental and economic values need to be appreciated over a much longer time period than the construction period and across a wider catchment than a single development site in order to ensure developments contribute positively to their location.

Much of this longer term value can be brought about in a number of ways at little cost (outlined within this guide):

- Responding to settlement form;
- Recognising the site’s role in the settlement;
- Creating a more connected place;
- Safe, sociable streets & spaces;
- Using architectural features

strategically.

Approaches to the assessment of development value as it contributes over time will be welcomed as part of a more comprehensive appreciation of the value development can bring to a community as a whole. Likewise alternative financing models which may include investment and income based value generation and which can create accountability to the ongoing quality and value of development, post construction maybe ways of building stewardship into the land procurement process.

Alternative delivery mechanisms such as Community Land Trusts, or cooperatives of Self and Custom builders are increasing in scale and demonstrating high quality where an early stake in design is extended to end occupiers.

Development in rural areas across the district is in line with the NPPF requirement (Para 68) for small sites to deliver 10% of development. There is a role for small sites in sustaining a local workforce of builders and developers and ensuring short and medium term delivery of housing in the district with a diversity of different products.

DESIGN, ACCESSIBILITY & INCLUSIVENESS

Public places, streets and spaces have long been a setting for democratic expression: market places, rallies, celebrations, demonstrations. As society diversifies, so too must the flexibility of public space and buildings expand to cater for all.



Towns and rural settlements throughout Mid Devon already demonstrate accessible and inclusive public space. Invariably streets are distinctively without pavements in places. The equity of these spaces is different to more recent developments which prioritise the car above the pedestrian in the street.

The design of places which are inherently accessible and inclusive (and not requiring bolt on or retrospective adaptation) begins with a placemaking approach:

- *Consider accessibility at the outset of the design process to resolve gradient, levels and internal building design at a strategic masterplan scale rather than suffer unintended consequences of an ill-considered site layout which could have been avoided;*
- *Look for precedents locally which offer good accessible solutions within the context of the historic settlement pattern and built form;*
- *Use integrated solutions in preference to bolt-ons;*
- *Consider the requirements of the Equality Act (DDA) audit and Part M of Building Regulations at the earliest possible stage in the project to allow all parts of the design process to respond;*

An accessible and inclusive environment is closely linked to the creation of a legible and integrated development. The principles throughout this design guide espouse the need to integrate new residents with existing communities. Streets and spaces, whilst being safe and overlooked, are also open thoroughfares where people, familiar and unfamiliar, meet and to some degree partake in exchange. The design of connected pedestrian environments are by their nature more inclusive than segregated vehicle dominated environments and whether in Main Towns or Villages, establishing the principles of walkable neighbourhoods is a good basis for meeting the needs of a variety of people and abilities where access to facilities and services are within easy reach of the majority of people.

Accessibility needs change over a lifetime and sometimes through changes in circumstances over night. Designing in adaptability where all eventualities cannot necessarily be accounted for at the outset is an important consideration in new buildings.

To promote accessibility and inclusivity, the Council wishes to encourage provision of ramped or level access to new dwellings and for developers to consider the requirements of Lifetime Homes: providing space and structure within buildings for possible future installations such as lifts or additional WCs.

Different approaches to access can affect how buildings and public realm combine to create streets.



BRADNINCH

EMPLOYMENT & COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT

The Mid Devon Local Plan commits to “support sustainable economic success”. The Vision for the district identifies that high quality development in the right places will be instrumental in regenerating and benefiting all areas.

The primary aim of employment and commercial buildings is to meet the needs of the businesses who occupy them and facilitate their growth and sustainability. However, as part of a wider planning strategy, far from being isolated buildings, employment and commercial development, designed to a high quality and located correctly can be a catalyst for much wider benefits to the local area and in the district and contribute to the reduction of carbon emissions.

In a similar way to residential development, employment and commercial development has the potential to affect the identity of the district. The process of preparing the Local Plan and the Sustainability Appraisal have helped develop a picture of the district, its characteristics, constraints and sustainability issues and this Design Guide among other documents has supplemented this profiling of the district. This definition helps identify an approach to employment and commercial development which contributes to the distinctiveness of the district.

A distinctive place, which generates footfall, encourages sense of belonging and facilitates satisfaction among communities supports a thriving economy and while this Design Guide cannot determine the location of employment provision across the district (this has already been determined within the Local Plan), it can assist in the design of developments which contribute to and benefit from the distinctiveness of the district, its towns, villages and countryside.

While strategic growth and provision for employment has been made in the allocation of employment sites throughout the district, the

Local Plan supports job creation as part of any proposal where it is supported by careful analysis of the benefits this brings the sustainability of the community and settlement as a whole. (Policy SP1; para 2.12). By its many references to enhanced connectivity, the guide encourages an integrated design approach to employment and other uses to improve accessibility and to promote social inclusion and interaction.

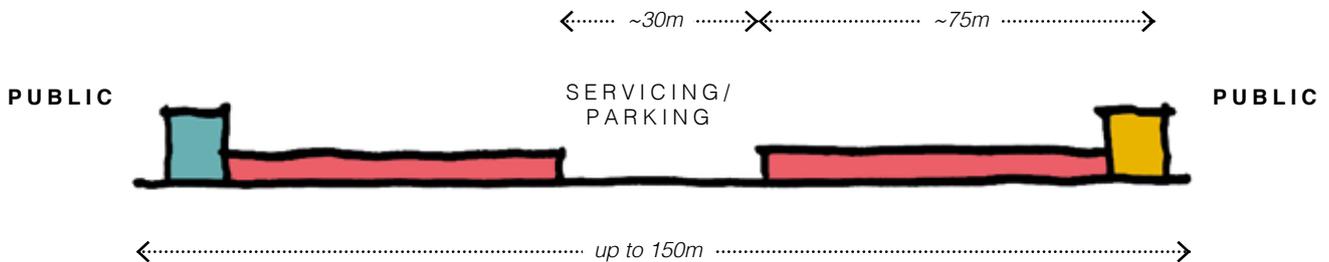
The design of new employment buildings and sites within towns and rural settlements should have regard to the settlement pattern and follow the process of defining the contribution buildings can make to the integrity of this form described in Volume 2 of this Design Guide.

In addition, the opportunity to upgrade existing employment and commercial areas and town centres with better designed facilities can facilitate some of the most pressing repair required in the Main Towns where there has been a trend of zoned, single use development on town centre sites or edge of town industrial estates.

In these locations each individual site should consider the contribution it can make to cumulative change in the following areas:

Outward facing, building frontage, street enclosure and overlooking. Certain components of the employment provision identified within the Local Plan lend themselves better to creating public fronting buildings: offices, retail, leisure, healthcare, education and other public facilities. Likewise a proportion of the Gross Internal Floorspace, comprising any communal or serviced areas of an employment facility maybe

Development blocks in employment areas can be large to accommodate large footprint operational buildings. Locating office and ancillary functions around the perimeter and facing outwards and enclosing the servicing and parking within the block is key to creating better public space around the block.

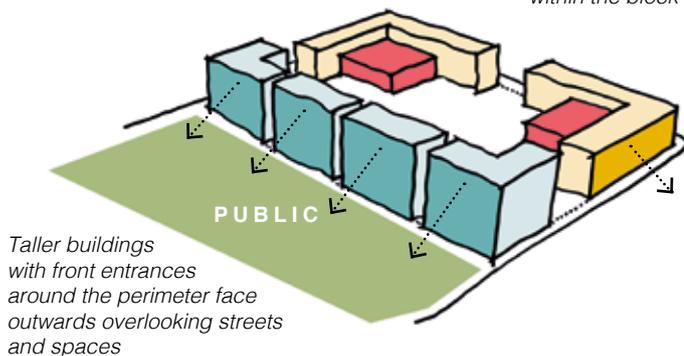


able to provide additional value as publicly accessible, shared or co-working space increasing the efficiency of the serviced building model as well as the contribution it makes to the public realm. Where these are included as part of a mix of employment uses on a site, they can be used within the site layout to create outward facing frontage to development, either at ground floor (consider the location of public entrances to buildings) or above ground floor to create additional height to otherwise low-rise buildings and to help create a street which has human scale proportions and which is

large sheds have dominated. Enclosing servicing and parking to the rear of, or within courtyards enclosed by, buildings will help improve the overall environment

Connected and permeable layouts can improve accessibility of employment areas for access by sustainable means and it can provide greater flexibility where blocks of development have a variety of street frontages around them, being able to accommodate the needs of businesses requiring a more prominent public presence and those that include more anti-social functions such as noisy or dirty processes.

Servicing, parking and large footprint single storey functional buildings are set behind the facade or enclosed within the block



In the countryside, employment and commercial buildings have a longstanding role in the rural economy and as such they contribute important features within the landscape, both visually and functionally. The majority of existing development within the countryside conforms to the typologies described within Volume 2 of this Design Guide (Page 74: Countryside) and should continue to contribute these distinctive forms of development within the landscape, all be it they may come about on unallocated sites, permissible under development management policies and requiring no planning permission at all.

overlooked by suitable uses on either side.

Overall, many commercial buildings are developed to be let with business models based on the long term lettable income of the building. The design of buildings which have built in adaptability over time according to the requirements of changing occupiers can help ensure their long term potential to sustain an income and remain attractive as demands and commercial activity changes across the district. Designing in flexibility also helps the Council achieve their objectives of policy DM19, protection of employment land by allowing greater longevity of employment use, not restricted to a single occupier, or type of function.

Public realm focussed, improving the environment around employment areas for pedestrians can encourage greater integration with surrounding residential areas and reduce short journeys by car. Improving public space to provide a network of spaces in which employees and the public can spend breaks and time outside of working hours as well as public areas in which to meet makes the area more sustainable. This will involve creating more legibility and structure to areas where previously monotonous

SELF & CUSTOM BUILD

Alternative housing models, where an early stake in the design is extended to end occupiers, such as Self-build and Custom housebuilding projects, Community Land Trusts, co-housing projects or cooperatives of Self and Custom builders are increasing in scale and demonstrating high and distinctive design quality. Mid Devon District Council wants to support more of this form of housing to boost more affordable housebuilding and offer greater housing choice.

Mid Devon offers a huge range of opportunities for unique self and custom built houses. Geographically large, it comprises great landscape and settlement variety. This diversity, described throughout other volumes of this Design Guide, can be the basis of a site selection and design process that individuals enter into when undertaking to build their own home.

The diversity of settings and sites across the district provides a rich choice of opportunities for self and custom build. Project briefs should be developed with careful reference to the Landscape Character and Settlement Form approach which this Guide takes to exploring context and appropriate site response - not every site will offer the right ingredients for every self or custom housebuilder.

Across the district, opportunities exist for a mix of plot sizes enabling different types of homes to be built, offering local people a real chance to build their own homes on permissioned, serviced building plots

ready for development. This may include smaller lower cost plots which can accommodate smaller homes. In any case, proposals should reflect the appropriateness of the scale and form of the development to its situation as described throughout this Design Guide. Proposed housing mix should also take account of the local demand on the Council's statutory Self-Build and Custom Housebuilding Register.

Early engagement between the self builder and the Local Authority can help identify where the requirements and aspirations of the projects can be most likely realised, and where the best contribution to the character of a particular location can be made.

This Guide has identified how the distinctiveness of Mid Devon is a function of landscape and settlement form and also outlines how sites in different locations in and around settlements can best contribute in a positive way to the distinctiveness of a given location. Self & Custom build opportunities are not exempt in their ability to make a positive contribution to the character of the district and as such the design of such projects should follow the same process outlined throughout this Guide in understanding the context and role of a site:

First consider the landscape setting and the characteristics of this setting which help development retain a distinctiveness in association with each particular landscape type (see Page 7 of Volume 2 of this guide).

Secondly, consider the form of the settlement the opportunity finds itself within as described within the 7 Settlement Typologies defined within the guide for Villages (see, Page 26 of Volume 2 of the guide).

Thirdly, consider the position of the development in relation to the settlement form and the guidance on the appropriate design approach according to the 13 variations of Site Situation defined within the guide for Villages (see Page 45 of Volume 2 of the guide).

Finally, using the Compendium of District Design (Volume 3 of the guide), consider how various detailed elements of design are dealt with in different situations across the district and how these should be applied in relation to the settlement location and the site situation within that settlement.

According to the approach described it may be deemed appropriate that self and custom build projects on larger sites are best arranged in a series of parcels. This can help take account of local demand and viability and ensure that the design character and wider housing offer across a site is not compromised.

Arranging Custom and Self Build housing in clusters will also enable construction traffic and different build outs to be better managed and better aligned with the design aspirations, constraints and design quality expectations. Clustering of plots/



properties would also help in terms of management of sales and marketing. Clusters of five or more homes in a parcel is recommended.

In these cases it is strongly encouraged that the design response is communicated as a design code which embodies the principles which have been developed through the use of the Guide and the process described above. Prepared in discussion between the Council and the applicant such codes can help explore and communicate how groups of self and custom build homes are being considered in the context of the character of the settlement or location in questions.

Using the Design Guide to secure a design code can enable development to come forward more quickly and the Council may seek to link a code to a planning permission via a planning condition.

Design codes should be kept as simple as possible to avoid stifling the ability of Self and Custom builders to build innovative and creatively designed homes and undermine market demand. The Design Guide provides a wealth of ready-made contextualisation and site categorisation which can structure how design codes are prepared. The accompanying Pocket Guide provides a concise way of checking a design code for a group of self or custom build plots has made all the necessary design considerations.

Self & Custom build design codes should strike a careful balance between flexibility and prescription: too restrictive and it will be more challenging for a landowner to sell plots, too flexible and there is a risk that design does not contribute positively to the distinctiveness of the location.

Key design code parameters should be defined with reference to the role the site plays within the settlement, outlining the acceptable form of development on each plot (for example scale, massing, materials, height, layout, amenity and landscaping) in this context (see Page 45 of Volume 2 of the guide). But Self and Custom build design codes may want to provide further clarity about what aspect of a design is mandatory and what is optional and how this applies to the plot and/or wider site. Menus of alternative design solutions for specific elements are encouraged but should be founded on the principles already defined within this Guide with regards to the use of a range of architectural details performing different functions within the settlement and site context.

The Council also encourages the use of a 'Plot Passport' when 'Self Build'

plots are marketed to buyers. Such documents can help translate the design code into a series of easily understood principles and they are becoming more widely used as part of site marketing. Plot Passports are not normally needed where a Custom Build developer manages the build out of a site and homes are built for the homeowner to complete themselves or built to their specification, ready to move in. This includes community-led housing not involving serviced building plots for sale to the public.

When part of larger housing sites, the location of Self and Custom build projects should be considered holistically as part of any site strategy and settlement context of the whole scheme. Prominent self and custom build plots within the scheme present opportunities to introduce unique and special features but these should be considered for their ability to contribute to an overall approach to the site in its context according to the process described in this Design Guide. The location of the self and custom build elements within a large scheme will also have a bearing on what role they play in the settlement and site context and therefore how they contribute to the overall site design response.