

Note on housing design

In the context of town planning design refers to the art of making places for people whether in towns, cities, streets and other spaces. It includes the way places work as well as how they look.

National policy states that planning should always seek to secure high quality design and a good standard of amenity for all existing and future occupants of buildings. This is identified as being particularly important for the design of homes that people live in and the spaces surrounding those homes.

The aim in Mid Devon is to deliver high quality buildings and spaces that meet the need of users, taking account of an aging population whilst ensuring compatibility with surrounding development and uses.

The interpretation of design can be subjective and in order to guide decision making in planning there are a number of planning policies as well as guidance documents to be referred to when considering the design of a proposed development.

Design is not simply the 'look' of a development but includes matters such as its function/adaptability/coherency/sustainability/practicality and the connection between people and places being created. Although visual appearance and the architecture of individual buildings are very important factors, securing high quality and inclusive design goes beyond aesthetic considerations. The National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG) states: Achieving good design is about creating places, buildings, or spaces that work well for everyone, look good, last well, and will adapt to the needs of future generations.

The design of new housing developments is assessed against the following planning policies and guidance in the National Planning Practice Guidance.

The National Planning Policy Framework

The Government consider good design to be a key aspect of sustainable development, indivisible from good planning, and should contribute positively to making places better for people. The NPPF states that developments should:

- function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;
- establish a strong sense of place, using streetscapes and buildings to create attractive and comfortable places to live, work and visit; optimise the potential of the site to accommodate development, create and sustain an appropriate mix of uses (including incorporation of green and other public space as part of developments) and support local facilities and transport networks;
- respond to local character and history, and reflect the identity of local surroundings and materials, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation;
- create safe and accessible environments where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine quality of life or community cohesion; and

- are visually attractive as a result of good architecture and appropriate landscaping.
-

The NPPF goes on to state that design policies should avoid unnecessary prescription or detail and should concentrate on guiding the overall scale, density, massing, height, landscape, layout, materials and access of new development in relation to neighbouring buildings and the local area more generally. Also, policies and decisions should not attempt to impose architectural styles or particular tastes and they should not stifle innovation, originality or initiative through unsubstantiated requirements to conform to certain development forms or styles. It is, however, proper to seek to promote or reinforce local distinctiveness.

The NPPF indicates that local planning authorities should not refuse planning permission for buildings or infrastructure which promote high levels of sustainability because of concerns about incompatibility with an existing townscape, if those concerns have been mitigated by good design (unless the concern relates to a designated heritage asset and the impact would cause material harm to the asset or its setting which is not outweighed by the proposal's economic, social and environmental benefits). This policy is echoed in the NPPG.

Mid Devon Local Plan Policies that set the context for assessing design

Mid Devon Core Strategy: COR1, COR2 and COR3

COR1 Strategic policy with regards to achieving sustainable development, including reference to accessible forms of development, integrated development, innovative design and clear distinction of spaces.

COR2 Requires development to sustain the distinctive quality, character and diversity of Mid Devon's environmental assets through high quality sustainable design which reinforces the character and legibility of the built environment and creates attractive places, as well as the efficient use of natural resources and the preservation and enhancement of Mid Devon's natural landscape.

COR3 Strategic policy with regards to meeting housing need, but also refers to needing an appropriate mix of dwelling sizes and types.

Local Plan Part 3

Policy DM2 sets the principles that development should demonstrate to encourage new development to be of high quality, including: clear understanding of the characteristics of the site, its wider context and the surrounding area; efficient and effective use of the site; positive contribution to local character including any heritage or biodiversity assets and the setting of heritage assets; creation of safe and accessible places that also encourage sustainable modes of travel such as walking and cycling; visually attractive places that are well integrated with surrounding buildings, streets and landscapes, and do not have an unacceptably adverse effect on the privacy and amenity of the proposed or neighbouring properties and uses, taking account of: Architecture/ Siting, layout, scale and massing/ Orientation and fenestration/ Materials, landscaping and green infrastructure/ Appropriate drainage including sustainable drainage systems (SUDs) and connection of foul drainage to a mains sewer where available.

Major residential development proposals will be required to achieve 'green' status under at least 8 of the 12 Building for Life criteria.

Policy DM14 – Design of housing – Requires new housing development to deliver:

High quality local places taking in to account physical context, local character, density and land use mix;

Adequate levels of daylight, sunlight and privacy to private amenity spaces and principal windows;

Suitably sized rooms and overall floor space which allows for adequate storage and movement within the building together with external space for recycling, refuse and cycle storage;

Adaptable dwellings that can accommodate a range of occupiers and their changing needs over time which will include the provision of a stairway suitable for stair lift installation or space for the provision of a lift in homes with more than one storey;

Private amenity space that reflects the size, location, floor space and orientation of the property;

Sustainable forms of development that maximise the natural benefits of the site through design, materials, technology and orientation;

On sites of 10 houses or more the provision of 20% of dwellings built to the lifetime homes standard;

Car parking in accordance with Policy DM8

DM27 identifies that heritage assets (such as Conservation Areas/Listed buildings) are an irreplaceable resource that contributes to the character of the district. The assessment of impact that the design of a development will have on an area will include consideration of any impact on heritage assets.

Building For Life 12

In addition to the above policies, further guidance encouraging good design of new housing is found in Building For Life 12 (BFL 12) produced by the Design Council. BFL 12 is the industry standard for the design of new housing developments. It is intended that through applying the 12 principles of Building For Life that new housing development can be attractive, functional and sustainable.

Other national requirements.

The Government has introduced a series of National Space Standards for residential properties which set out suitably sized rooms and overall floorspace amounts that allow for adequate storage and movement . These update and replace policy DM15 of the Mid Devon Local Plan part 3 on dwelling sizes.

Design review panel

The NPPF suggests that local planning authorities should have local design review arrangements in place to provide assessment and support to ensure high standards of design. The Design Review Panel provides an impartial, multi-disciplinary, constructive, expert, peer review process during the pre-application stage of the planning process. Mid Devon have used the local Design Review Panel arrangements as part of the assessment of development design on a number of occasions, including Alexandra Lodge, Tiverton; Cummings Nursery, Cullompton. The NPPF states local planning

authorities should have regard to the recommendations from the design review panel when assessing planning applications.