



**BIRMINGHAM**  
DESIGN GUIDE

# Birmingham Design Guide

Vision Document

Creating inclusive, sustainable places

September 2017



“the City is placing good design  
at the heart of Birmingham’s development”

# Contents

Foreword	3
<b>1</b> Introduction	4
<b>2</b> The big design themes - strategic vision statements	8
▶ The Birmingham ID	
▶ Living and working places	
▶ Connectivity	
▶ Green infrastructure	
▶ Efficient and future-ready	
<b>3</b> Next steps and delivery	20



we want this vision document to stimulate aspirations and interest in how  
**our great city should develop and grow**

## Foreword



The quality of the City's environment - our buildings, our streets and squares, our green and blue spaces - will play an integral role in creating a sustainable, inclusive and connected City; where every child, citizen and place matters.

In order for Birmingham to continue to grow successfully within the international landscape; and enhance opportunities for its citizens, the City needs to focus on the delivery of high quality, bespoke places and architecture that add positively to the City's landscape.

The creation of such environments helps to feed enterprise and innovation, in turn delivering inclusive economic growth for the City's communities. It is also fundamental in supporting social mobility; health and well-being; creating adaptable housing to meet varied needs of our citizens; aiding multi-modal connectivity; and helping build climate and technological resilience.

We are placing good design at the heart of Birmingham's development, ensuring all new development contributes to positive placemaking. This is why the City is creating the Birmingham Design Guide. It will ensure design is the primary consideration for every scale of development, from household extensions and self-build homes, to public spaces and exemplar tall buildings.

The Guide will be adopted as planning guidance and supported by a new Birmingham Design and Conservation Review Panel, who will help realise the City's design ethos.

I am delighted to be launching Birmingham's renewed focus on delivering high quality design. This document is the first stage in the journey to creating a comprehensive new guide that we anticipate launching in early 2018. We want this Vision document to stimulate aspirations and interest in our great City, encouraging you to submit views on how we should approach design now and into the future.

**Councillor Ian Ward**  
Interim Leader  
Birmingham City Council

# 1 Introduction

Birmingham is experiencing unprecedented levels of investment in both infrastructure and new development, from the city centre and urban centres, to the urban fringe. This growth agenda will lead to the creation of 51,100 new homes, over 750,000sq.m of additional office floorspace, the delivery of 2 Regional Investment Sites and Birmingham becoming the centre of the High Speed 2 (HS2) rail network.

This diverse growth agenda will have an enduring impact on the City, with the new Design Guide playing an instrumental role in its success, ensuring high quality places are delivered.

The scale and potential for change is not restricted to major schemes and developments: the changing needs of society require homes to be adaptable and efficient; neighbourhoods to be welcoming, safe and attractive; places for work to compete with the best in the world; and citizens to be part of healthy, safe and happy communities. These components are key to achieving a vibrant, successful City; and will play an instrumental role in realising the Council's core priorities:

- Children - a great city to grow up in.
- Housing - a great city to live in.
- Jobs and skills - a great city to succeed in.
- Health - a great city to grow old in.

Collectively leading to 'a city of growth, where every child, citizen and place matters'.

The Birmingham Development Plan (2031) is the City's principle policy document that will guide this growth, providing strategic guidance on how sustainable development will be delivered across the City. At its core is Planning for Growth, which recognises high quality design as a primary component of delivering the City's growth agenda, via Policy PG3: Place making.

The new Design Guide will build on these place making principles, providing detailed guidance that will ensure future development supports the delivery of the City's strategic priorities.

Creating the new Guide will involve the following steps:

#### Stage 1: Design Vision (this document) - consultation

This Vision document outlines the City's intent, highlighting the importance of high quality design in creating a vibrant, inclusive City for our citizens, businesses and visitors. A series of consultation questions are set out at the back of this document.

#### Stage 1a: Birmingham Design and Conservation Review Panel (BDCR Panel) expressions of interest

The City will create a new Design Review Panel to help shape and implement the Design Guide.

#### Stage 2: Draft Birmingham Design Guide SPD

A draft Birmingham Design Guide will be published for a statutory period of public consultation and engagement building on the outcomes of the Vision document consultation.

#### Stage 3: Adoption of the Birmingham Design Guide SPD and formation of BDCR Panel

The Birmingham Design Guide will be adopted as planning guidance, guiding the inclusive sustainable growth of our City.



birmingham is experiencing  
unprecedented levels of investment

### The importance of good design

The City is placing significant emphasis on design and the importance of creating high quality places.

The benefits and importance of good design are wide reaching, impacting on every element of our lives:

#### Economic

Beyond the visual and user gains (form and function), high quality design can lead to wide ranging economic benefits. Good design across the City's diverse environments will create places people want to engage with, be a part of and invest in. This in turn will have a positive economic impact: attracting visitors, supporting businesses, stimulating development, raising land values and regenerating communities.

#### Environmental

As our environment continues to evolve it is important new development is able to respond to these changes. The creation of resilient, adaptable places needs to be at the heart of our approach to development. As the City brings forward its growth agenda, new technologies and infrastructure, energy efficient buildings, sustainable forms of transport, adaptable designs and innovative green and ecological infrastructure will be vital.

Appropriately integrated, these measures can lead to high quality places that generate intrigue in the built environment, inviting use and interaction. At the same time, we need to enhance our environment; provide biodiversity gains; soften our urban spaces; provide more efficient modes of transport; and create healthier environments.

#### Social and health benefits

The core essence of good design is the creation of places and buildings that are visually and physically stimulating to the people who use, reside and interact with them. In turn these places can lead to wide ranging social and health benefits for those users.

As our City continues to develop and grow, it is important that these health and social factors play a key role in the design of our environments. How people use and interact with places and spaces should be a primary driver of the design process. To achieve this, buildings and spaces must effectively deliver form and function, adding to the physical environment, whilst meeting the varied social, health and wellbeing needs of their occupants and users.

“buildings and spaces  
must effectively deliver  
form and function”



# Big design themes

## Strategic vision statements

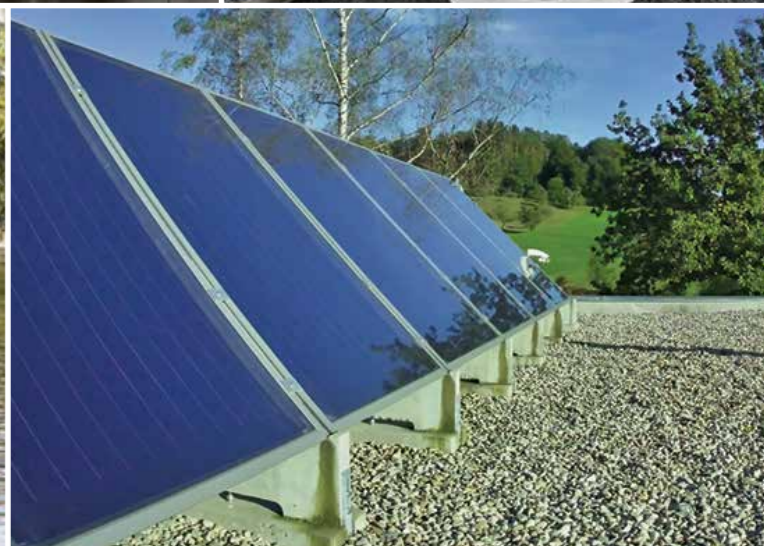
Responding to the key components of high quality sustainable design and Policy PG3, the new Birmingham Design Guide will present five Big Design Themes. They are:

- The Birmingham ID.
- Living and working places.
- Connectivity.
- Green infrastructure.
- Efficient and future-ready.

These Themes will seek to embed the key elements of good design into all future development, providing detailed information that will help ensure every scale of development positively contributes to the future of Birmingham.

These contributions will be steered via design principles and best practice examples, which will enable the delivery of high quality environments worthy of our City.

What follows sets out the broad context of each Theme, which will evolve and develop into specific areas of guidance within the Design Guide. This will be set out in the draft SPD, which will be launched following the outcomes of the consultation on the Vision document.



### The Birmingham ID

- Character and cultural diversity
- Historic environment

### Living and working places

- Buildings, homes and neighbourhoods
- Household extensions
- Tall buildings

### Connectivity

- Sustainable and active travel
- Active streets
- Public realm

### Green infrastructure

- Trees, landscape and open space
- Biodiversity
- Rivers, canals and water resources

### Efficient and future-ready

- Air quality
- Energy efficiency and low carbon development
- Digital infrastructure
- Waste management

## The Birmingham ID

Birmingham's unique identity is one of its key assets that must be celebrated, strengthened and positively utilised to help support the continued growth of our dynamic City.

The City's landscape comprises a range of characteristics which have created the Birmingham ID. This ID has evolved as the City has embraced waves of city plans and inherited centuries of development, each leaving their own legacy, from mediaeval Digbeth and Georgian Colmore Estate, to the Regency housing of Edgbaston and modernism of the city centre. This evolution continues with high quality developments such as Brindley Place, Attwood Green, the Library of Birmingham and Selfridges, adding to the eclectic City lived, worked and played in today.

Whilst the buildings, streets, canals and green spaces play a fundamental role in establishing the character of an area; the communities and users of these spaces are equally important. Birmingham benefits from a culturally diverse

population and is home to one of the youngest populations in Europe. These social characteristics enrich the City and play an instrumental role in its continued vibrancy. It is this cultural diversity, coupled with the built environment that has created Birmingham's ID, from its vibrant city centre quarters, to its residential suburbs and diverse green assets.

As these environs continue to develop and evolve, it is important new development positively utilises and adds to the unique components of Birmingham. This will ensure the City's finite historic, cultural and biological environments have a prominent role in its future; and introducing new developments into the City's landscape that leave their own legacy on Birmingham's ID.

“the evolution continues with high quality developments”

# Living and working places

The places where we live and work play an important role in the quality of the lives we lead. As Birmingham continues to grow, developments must seek to create high quality buildings and spaces which enhance the living and working environments of its Citizens.

These environments range from individual homes to shopping centres and work places. Whilst providing differing roles and experiences, they must all fulfil their function, and positively contributing to place. This will require designs to consider a range of elements to achieve the high quality outcomes desired. From ensuring proposals effectively integrate and enhance their surroundings; to creating active, safe spaces and places that invite use; and provide sufficient

internal and external environments for individual users or residents.

The quality of our living and working places will be a key measure of Birmingham's future success, contributing to inclusive economic growth and the health and wellbeing of our citizens. As such the City will only welcome high quality designs that create inclusive, sustainable living and working environments.



“developments must seek to create high quality buildings and spaces”



# Connectivity

The ability to effectively move across Birmingham is fundamental to creating a cohesive and inclusive City. This ranges from being able to walk to your local shop or urban centre, to accessing public transport services that link communities to the city centre and places of work.

Over the last decade the City has undertaken a number of infrastructure enhancements that have improved connectivity across it, including public realm enhancements, to the extension of the tram network, regeneration of New Street Station and new pedestrian and cycle routes.

Supplementing these dedicated projects, new development must contribute to enhancing

connectivity, effectively linking to existing networks; and when creating new, applying a clear hierarchy of streets and spaces that aid movement. Such spaces should be animated by adjacent uses and high quality public realm that invite activity. This will ensure our City is permeable, safe and dynamic.



**new development must contribute to enhancing connectivity**

# Green infrastructure

As one of Britain's greenest cities, Birmingham's green infrastructure contributes significantly to its attractiveness as a place to live and work. This infrastructure comprises a range of assets which often serve a multitude of roles: as recreation and amenity space; transport networks and biodiversity hubs. In turn, they provide a number of health and wellbeing benefits to our citizens; and add to the quality of our built environment.

As the City grows, this infrastructure must develop with it, supporting and adapting to the future needs of the City, from climate change mitigation to the demands of a growing population.

Future development will play a fundamental role in enhancing the City's green infrastructure, ensuring well designed public and private open

space is provided, existing landscape assets are protected and biodiversity gains are delivered. These gains are likely to take many forms such as living elements on buildings, new ecological networks and softening the public realm. By ensuring new development incorporates an appropriate portfolio of these measures the City's green assets and landscape character will enhance in partnership with its built form.



“future development will play a fundamental role in enhancing the City's green infrastructure”

# Efficient and future-ready

In order for Birmingham to grow sustainably, it must adapt to changing environments and respond to the fast moving tech requirements of our businesses and citizens. The creation of adaptable buildings will play a key role in this, as will the development of utilities and services infrastructure that can enable our City to thrive.

A key driver of our future environment will be the emerging impacts of climate change and the subsequent need to improve the efficiency of how we use natural resources. New development must respond to these challenges through the incorporation of designs, technologies and infrastructure that enable decentralised energy to be utilised, water consumption to be reduced, energy usage to be minimised and waste to be managed.

The City must also be at the forefront of advances in digital and communication infrastructure, ensuring our businesses and citizens are able to maximise the varied benefits of these advances. Whether for inclusive economic growth, leisure, entertainment or health. In order to ensure these advances can be realised, new development must incorporate known infrastructure and enable adaptation to accommodate future advances.



“the City must...be at the forefront of advances in digital and communication infrastructure”



# 3 Delivery

In launching this Vision document the Council are inviting views and comments on the aspirations and intent outlined within it. Its role is to start a discussion and invite engagement that can be fed into the production of the SPD and help shape future development across Birmingham.

The Council would like to hear your thoughts on the approach outlined and the future content of the Guide, framed around the broad consultation questions detailed below.

## Next steps

### Birmingham Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)

Over the coming months the Council will draft Birmingham's new Design Guide and undertake a period of consultation, prior to its adoption as planning guidance.

Once adopted, the Design Guide will become a material planning consideration in the development management process, directly supporting the delivery of Birmingham Development Plan (BDP) Policy PG3: Place making and the Birmingham Development Management Development Plan Document.

Whilst a key tool in steering good design across the City, the Design Guide will need to be read in conjunction with other relevant Supplementary Planning Documents, area specific policies and guidance such as Conservation Area Management Plans (CAMPs) and area

frameworks that provide bespoke guidance for specific areas of the City.

### The Birmingham Design and Conservation Review Panel

To support the implementation of the Design Guide, the Council is seeking to create a Birmingham Design and Conservation Review Panel. Its role will be to critically and objectively assess a range of development proposals received by the Council, ensuring they align with the requirements of the Design Guide: delivering high quality, sustainable design across every aspect of development.

### Expression of interest for Design and Conservation Review Panel

In order to create an effective Panel, the Council is seeking to gather a framework of professional volunteers from a diverse background who can contribute to the review process and help shape the future of Birmingham.

Panels will comprise of professionals from both within and outside the City Council. It is anticipated Panels may be held every month, with a relevant mix of expertise brought together to review proposals.

The Council would welcome expressions of interest from a broad range of professionals (individuals and organisations), who interact with the City.

Expressions of interest would be welcomed from (but not limited to) professionals working within built environment sectors (such as architecture, planning, surveying, civil engineering, landscape architecture, biodiversity, transport, heritage, etc); and those working in other relevant sectors related to health, children and young people, technology, recreation and leisure, community, arts and culture and the economy.

Interested parties are asked to submit details of how they feel their professional expertise could benefit the design review process via the Expression of Interest Form, available on the Council's website.

### Waheed Nazir

Corporate Director Economy  
Birmingham City Council

## Consultation Questions

The Council would like your views on the form and content of the new Design Guide and your responses to the following questions:

1. Do you think Birmingham needs a single design guide for the City?
2. How do you feel the Guide should present the City's design aspirations and guidance? Should the guide be very prescriptive with its guidance? Should it use sketches, images and photographs to help demonstrate how the guidance could be implemented?
3. Do you have any comments on the current suite of design guidance used by the Council?
  - Is there anything lacking within this guidance?
  - Are there principles that should be retained?
  - Are there specific areas of existing guidance that are out of date or you feel should not be taken forward into the new Guide? If so, please outline your rationale for this.
4. Are there specific design considerations that need to be included within the Guide, which are important to the inclusive, sustainable and connected growth of Birmingham? Do you agree with the Big Design Themes as key drivers of good design?
5. Do you have any specific views on how tall buildings, density, technology, green infrastructure and heritage should be guided and managed by the City?
6. Do you have any other comments on the structure, principles or approach of the Design Guide?

These questions can also be downloaded on a response form on the Council's website:  
[www.birmingham.gov.uk/designguide](http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/designguide)

Please submit your thoughts and comments to the City Design Team; contact details overpage.

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**a great City** to live in  
**a great City** to succeed in  
**a great City** to grow old in

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**2031**



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