



# places for living

march2001



places  
for living

Shipways

# places for living

Adopted by Birmingham City Council Regeneration Advisory Team  
as Supplementary Planning Guidance

march 2001

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# introduction

## the background

**RESIDENTIAL** development is the major land use in Birmingham and the majority of new development proposals within the city will continue to be for new homes. It is important that residential areas are desirable, sustainable and enduring. They should provide good quality accommodation in a safe and attractive environment, which people choose as a place to live.

Birmingham has many desirable and attractive residential areas and it is essential we continue this tradition. Birmingham in common with most other cities has suffered from comprehensive redevelopment and failed experiments in housing design, layout and construction. Similarly volume house builders with standard house types combined often with inflexible planning and highways standards have resulted in many areas of characterless housing that can be seen anywhere in the country. Where previously we created places, we now build housing estates.



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One of the main issues we must address is making residential development more sustainable. We need to encourage walking, cycling and the use of public transport and allow easy access for everyone - including people without a car. Furthermore the buildings should be adaptable, well insulated and generally of the highest quality. The use of environmentally friendly materials, sustainable drainage, water and waste recycling and the use of alternative energy should also be considered if we are serious about sustainability.

On a positive note Birmingham has made great strides in recent years with many new high quality developments that seek to address these issues but more could still be done. This guide should help everyone involved in housing development achieve high quality and sustainable 'places for living'.

Unsuccessful experiments in new forms of housing design, layout and construction on a national scale has affected Birmingham as much as anywhere.



Many developments are a positive step forward.  
The Mailbox - housing as part of a mixed use development.



There is still much to be done to improve the quality of housing development.



The principles are based on tried and tested methods of building successful places...

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## the approach to residential design guidance

**PLACES FOR LIVING** is aimed to be both inspiring and positive in encouraging quality residential proposals. This has resulted in a fresh examination of standards. Whilst standards exist in order to ensure developments meet certain objectives such as safety and privacy, they can reduce everything to the lowest common denominator particularly if interpreted inflexibly. Standards can provide a useful guideline in the design process, however the main focus should be on achieving the objectives behind the standards. The aim is to focus on qualitative rather than simply quantitative issues. The approach also builds on national advice such as PPG3, By Design, Places, Streets and Movement as well as the work of the Urban Task Force.

This guide aims to be as objective as possible, dealing with basic design issues and principles rather than personal taste with the examples used to illustrate general points. The guide is intended to positively influence the development process as much as the outcome.

**The key is for developers to employ skilled designers to provide the best solution for each particular context and to take a holistic approach to development considering design at an early stage.**

### THE APPROACH

- Builds on the design principles set out in the Birmingham Plan.
- Focuses on 5 over-riding principles that cover a wide range of issues concerned with housing development.
- Illustrates some of the ways of achieving the principles.
- Reserves the use of standards in certain circumstances (see Appendix).

### THE FORMAT

This guide is divided into five main sections. Each section starts with a general introduction outlining the main issues followed by the principles. These take the form of policy statements with a justification.



...as well as drawing on the experience of successful recent examples.

## THE REQUIREMENTS

All proposals will be judged on their own merits. Proposals that follow the spirit of the guidance will be received positively. Conversely poor quality proposals that ignore the issues and the requirements will be unlikely to gain consent. To help in assessing proposals the following should be produced as a minimum:

- Existing and proposed floor plans, elevations and relevant sections.
- A plan showing the development in its wider context.
- Contextual photographs.
- A topographical/tree survey where appropriate (existing and proposed).
- A design statement.

The design statement should outline how the principles have been achieved (or a justification of why they haven't been achieved). The degree of detail will depend on the size and nature of the proposed development (see also 'build on local character'). For larger or more complex proposals or proposals on sensitive sites, perspectives and/or axonometric drawings may be requested. A three-dimensional master plan may also be required, particularly for large scale developments.

The involvement of the Planning Authority, the local community and other relevant bodies at an early stage would also be advisable to speed up the decision making process and arrive at a mutually agreeable solution.

## THE MAIN PRINCIPLES

**1. places not estates** - Successful developments must address wider issues than simply building houses and create distinctive places that offer a choice of housing and complementary activities nearby.

**2. moving around easily** - Places should be linked up with short, direct public routes overlooked by frontages.

**3. safe places, private spaces** - Places must be safe and attractive with a clear division between public and private space.

**4. building for the future** - Buildings and spaces should be adaptable to enhance their long-term viability and built so they harm the environment as little as possible.

**5. build on local character** - Developers must consider the context and exploit and strengthen the characteristics that make an area special.

The principles are based on tried and tested methods of building successful places that have often been ignored or forgotten until recently. They also build on the experience of recent successful developments in Birmingham and elsewhere.

The examples accompanying the principles are not intended as solutions but are included to illustrate the points. There can be many ways to achieve the objectives. This guide is intended to support and encourage everyone involved in delivering quality developments. It also highlights the role good design can play in achieving places that are successful and sustainable in social, economic and environmental terms.

places not estates



Kings Heath - an area with a close mix of uses.



Where appropriate, uses should be mixed within streets and/or buildings.

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# places not estates

**DEVELOPMENT** should address the needs of the whole community. We should avoid building housing estates that have few facilities and a limited choice of built form and tenure. This is socially divisive and can encourage a reliance on the car putting many people at a disadvantage. The aim should be to build accessible places that offer a choice of housing and complementary activities nearby.

The aim should be to build accessible places that offer a choice of housing and complementary activities nearby.



Mixed tenure street with similar quality throughout - Poundbury.

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Such 'walkable neighbourhoods' (see also 'moving around easily') are also best suited to achieving higher densities of development with densities increasing towards the city centre, local centres and along public transport corridors. PPG 3 suggests residential densities should not fall below 30-50 dwellings per hectare in order to make an efficient use of land. The City Council Unitary Development Plan suggests that densities of at least 100 dwellings per hectare will be expected on sites within the City Centre, 50 dwellings per hectare in other centres and within corridors well served by public transport and 40 dwellings per hectare elsewhere. Whilst this is a useful guide, the issue of density is very complex. There are many additional factors to consider such as the form of development, the scale of development, the total catchment population, the degree of connectivity and the measure of density. A particular concern is context and character. Whilst high density forms in the appropriate place are to be encouraged, there are areas

where this would not be appropriate particularly where there is the loss of buildings and landscape that reinforce the positive character of an area.

In practice achieving residential densities of 30-50 dwellings per hectare will usually be possible whilst still allowing a variety of different approaches to suit the context. High quality developments can also be provided at densities that greatly exceed this figure such as many of the 'city living' developments. In some cases it may be appropriate to build to a lower density for example in largely landscape dominated settings or heavily constrained sites. Whilst density is a complex subject, the key is to create good places and provide the best design solution for the site and the character of the area, with the density figure used as a check.



Higher densities should be encouraged particularly in the centre, local centres and routes which are well served by public transport.

SKETCH BY GEORGE LEICH

Narrow individual plots designed by different architects. Schutterstrat, Delft, The Netherlands.





Flats above commercial.



Large urban 'villas'.

## People should have easy access to facilities such as shops, leisure and work opportunities.

### MIX THE USES

People should have easy access to facilities such as shops, leisure and work opportunities. A compatible mix of uses including 'live/work units' should often be provided particularly where development is proposed close to the city centre and local centres, main movement routes and important corners. Other less accessible areas will have less potential for a mix of uses and will be largely residential in character. The provision and nature of the mix will therefore depend on the context as well as the scale of the development, market demand and relevant planning policies.

This means there is:

- The opportunity to walk, cycle or use public transport rather than drive.
- A mix of people, including those who work in the area, who can support a good range of facilities.
- Surveillance of the area with people present day and night.
- A reduction in market risk - mixed areas can often adapt more easily to future trends.
- The opportunity to address shortfalls in current provision of uses and facilities.
- Locating mixed use in the proper context will better ensure its long term success.

**Where uses and tenures are mixed, this should generally be within streets and/or buildings and where practical single storey non-residential buildings should usually have other uses above such as flats. A management and maintenance agreement would also be beneficial.**

- Housing above other uses can increase densities, provide activity and surveillance throughout the day and night and use land efficiently.
- Housing can become valuable above uses such as shops where it would not be viable at ground level. A 'fine grain' of uses can offer more diversity of design and visual character in an area.
- Management agreements for mixed developments can ensure long term success.



Terraced housing.



Walk up flats.

Higher densities can be provided in a variety of forms to suit the context. Different building types can allow similar net densities in terms of habitable rooms per hectare.

### MIX THE HOUSE TYPES

Larger proposals should consider a mix of housing type, form and tenure, providing the design approach is consistent with the positive aspects of local character. There should also be a similar high quality throughout.

- A variety of housing type and tenure of the same quality offers the opportunity to build communities which avoid social exclusion and stigma, making places more physically and economically accessible.
- A varied townscape can make places more interesting and memorable.
- A range of dwelling types can provide for the diverse cultural, social and physical needs of people as well as better allowing an area to adapt to social and economic changes over time.
- A mix of house type and tenure can ensure the presence of people at different times of the day making places more secure.

### SUB-DIVIDE DEVELOPMENT SITES

When developing larger sites consideration should be given to sub-dividing the site into narrower development plots developed and/or designed individually, particularly where this is a positive local characteristic.

- Narrow plots can add a greater variety of uses and entrances encouraging more activity and diversity,
- Narrow plots can offer more design variety and relate better to many areas such as parts of the Jewellery Quarter where this is a feature.
- Small plots also help to avoid blank walls when stepping up a slope.

### BUILD TO HIGHER DENSITIES

The City Centre, local centres and areas that are well served by public transport have the potential to accommodate a higher density of development. However on larger sites it is important that a range of dwelling types are provided to cater for different needs.

- Compact places can make it easier for people to walk and cycle to facilities and use public transport.
- More people living and working locally helps to support better - and more - local facilities and services such as shops and public transport. This also makes environmental initiatives like recycling and combined heat and power schemes more viable.
- More local facilities can reduce the need to travel and offer an increased local choice to the less mobile.
- More people living in the city can reduce the amount of green-field land required for housing.



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Whilst higher densities should be provided in appropriate locations, this is not a universal solution. It is important in areas where lower density forms are a positive characteristic that harm is not caused by insensitive infill and redevelopment at higher densities. For example in a number of suburban areas within the city the character of the area is not just emphasised by the scale and quality of the dwellings but also by their spacious settings, large rear gardens and mature landscape. The insertion of buildings on small plots without the same scale and setting will not be appropriate. In areas where higher densities are appropriate, the form and layout should offer a high quality living environment and should relate to the local context (see 'building on local character'). The use of innovative high density dwelling types will be encouraged.

- High density forms are not appropriate everywhere. Any aspiration to achieve higher densities must be balanced by contextual issues if we are to avoid harming those characteristics that make an area special.
- Merely upping the density of suburban forms and layouts by squeezing standard house types closer together and reducing space standards is unlikely to provide a quality living environment.
- The same density can be provided in a wide variety of forms, some will be more appropriate than others depending on the context.

**PROVIDE FOCAL SPACE**

On larger sites there will often be a need for high quality new focal spaces such as squares and parks to complement any new development. These should be functional providing for all ages, accessible, serve a local need and be well overlooked by building fronts. A management and maintenance agreement will usually be required.

- Focal spaces can enhance the character and the quality of the environment and can become a valuable recreational facility.



The street if properly designed can become a focal space.

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The requirements for the need and size of open space are determined by the Birmingham Plan. High quality proposals that deliver other public benefits may justify a departure from the Plan standard particularly where there is already convenient access to nearby open space

- Meeting a quantitative standard does not guarantee a quality result. In some cases it may be more beneficial to improve a nearby existing facility or provide a smaller space of an exceptional quality and usefulness. Occasionally a larger space than the standard may be beneficial. Creative solutions may also be appropriate such as designing the street as an amenity space.

## Form and layout should offer a high quality living environment.

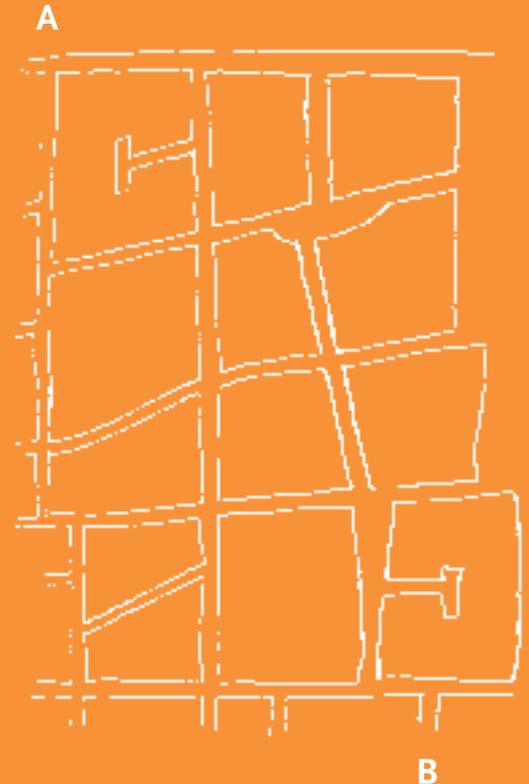
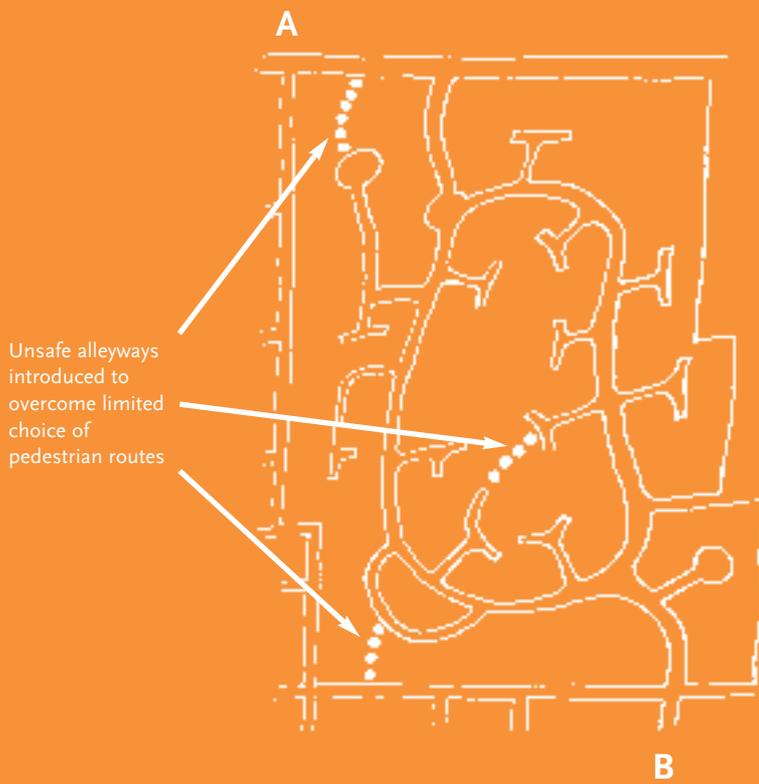


Parks can enhance the quality of the living environment and are a valuable recreation facility.

## moving around easily

The large block and culs-de-sac layout offers only three alternative routes from A - B without back tracking

Similar blocks with a connected street layout offers over fifteen different routes between A - B. Some routes are slightly shorter in length.



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# moving around easily

**IT IS** no use having local facilities and a good bus route if you cannot get there easily, particularly on foot. Poorly integrated developments requiring a car to get around should be avoided. Local movement networks must be considered in order to provide safe and convenient links by all means of transport. The aim should be to create 'walkable neighbourhoods'. As a guide 'doorstep facilities' such as a convenience shop or newsagent should ideally be within 2-3 minutes safe walk (250m) of your home. 5 minutes walk or 400m should take you to a local centre including local shops, a post office and bus stops. A train station or major public transport interchange and a primary school should if possible be within 10 minutes walk or 800m.



If you can't get to a facility you can't use it. The 'village centre' can be seen but not accessed from this cul-de-sac.



Linked streets are more flexible, offering safe and convenient pedestrian routes whilst traffic can be managed to avoid concerns about 'rat running'.

#### PROVIDE CONVENIENT ROUTES

A fundamental principle of this design guide is to create well integrated linked up places. Public routes should be connected, short, direct, well lit, overlooked by frontages and related to desire lines. Good public transport links and easy access for pedestrians and cyclists should be inherent in developments. Apart from routes through parks, canal corridors and pedestrianised streets, isolated pedestrian routes should be avoided.

- More connections to places like shops, leisure facilities and parks make routes between places shorter encouraging more people to walk and cycle.
- More people will use public transport if it is more accessible.
- Linked streets make it easier to find your way around and allow people a greater choice of routes and variety of experiences.
- Commercial developments can flourish if they are located on main movement routes.
- Connected streets encourage more activity which helps people feel safe and secure whilst avoiding over concentrations of traffic and congestion.
- Linked streets allow more flexibility for change in the future.
- Linked streets can avoid wasted space such as large turning circles for refuse vehicles.
- Isolated pedestrian routes can feel intimidating.

The aim should be to create 'walkable neighbourhoods'.

moving around easily



Pedestrian routes should be integrated with activity...



...and not isolated.

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#### CONSIDER THE WIDER AREA

Proposals should consider a far wider area than the site itself, particularly on larger developments. Developments should not only be linked up within the site (where the scale of development allows it), but should integrate with existing routes to connect to the wider area, in particular towards main streets and public facilities (see also 'build on local character').

- An analysis of the wider context can determine the wider movement patterns informing which links would be beneficial to open up such as a route to improve access to local facilities or public transport and which may be problematic for example a route that could encourage 'rat running'. It may also inform the potential for new commercial uses to be introduced and the size of development blocks.
- Integrating the development provides more convenient routes encouraging walking and cycling, makes it easier for people to find their way around, can improve access to public transport as well as relating better to the surrounding context.
- Short culs-de-sac accessed from a network of linked streets can add variety, encourage childrens play and sometimes make more efficient use of land.

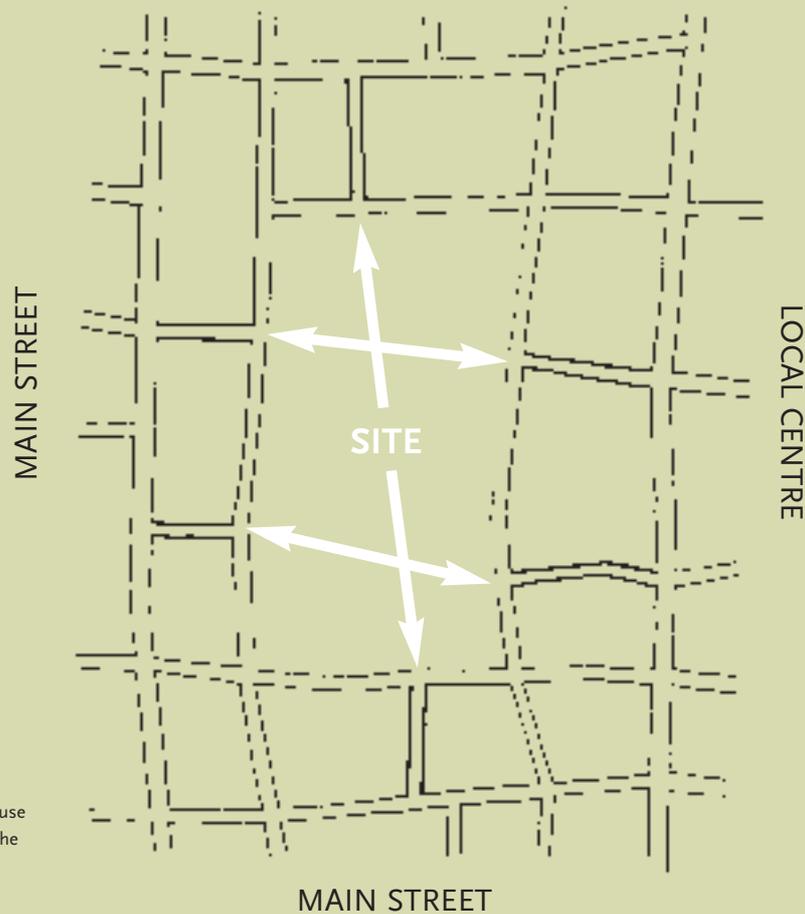
**Culs-de-sac can have benefits but only as part of an existing network of adequately linked streets.**

Short culs-de-sac accessed from a network of linked streets can add variety, encourage childrens play and sometimes make more efficient use of land.

## Proposals should consider a far wider area than the site itself.



Short culs-de sac can complement an existing network of linked streets.



Link the site to the wider area. Generally use the most connected and direct routes to the main streets and facilities (not all routes need to be through vehicular routes).

#### PROVIDE ACCESS FOR ALL

Developments should provide for the needs of everyone including people with disabilities and those with prams and push-chairs. This includes dealing with approach and access to buildings, adequate and convenient parking for disabled people and use of colour and tactile materials to assist blind and partially sighted people.

- Designing for people with disabilities makes access easier for everyone and encourages more people to use public buildings and spaces.



Designing for people with disabilities makes access easier for everyone.

Developments should provide for the needs of everyone.



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**BALANCE THE NEEDS OF CARS AND PEDESTRIANS**

Streets should do more than just accommodate traffic. They should offer a safe and attractive space for everyone who uses them. A range of street types from boulevards to 'home zones' can be designed to provide an attractive environment as well as to meet the practical requirements of any situation.

- Making walking and cycling a safe and pleasant experience can do much to encourage people to use cars less often as well as provide popular places to live.

Streets should be designed to discourage speeding traffic. Local residential streets should where possible, be designed for a 20mph (or less) speed limit (without significantly impeding emergency vehicles). Particular encouragement will be given to the creation of sub 10mph 'Home Zones' on the minor streets. The ratio of building height to width, street trees, building placement, road alignment, smaller corner radii, surface textures and physical traffic calming measures are all ways to reduce vehicle speeds. ('Vertical' calming measures should not be used on bus routes).

- Designing streets for low vehicle speeds can reduce the severity and number of accidents so streets become attractive and useful amenity space.
- Reducing speeds through design is self enforcing.

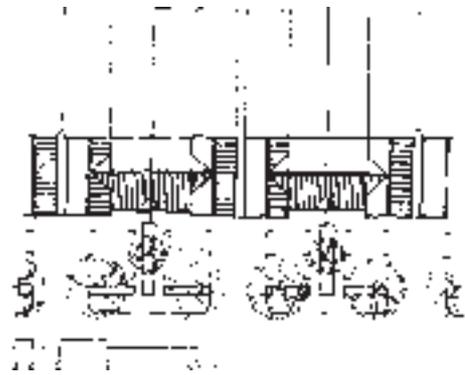
Streets should do more than just accommodate traffic.



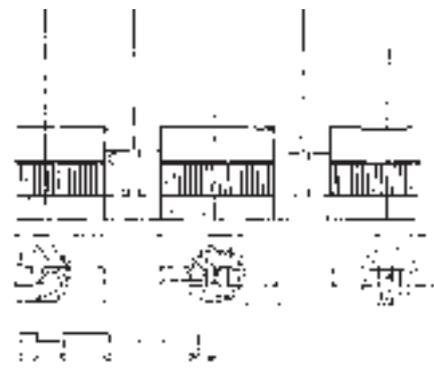
On street parking between pavement build-outs.



Wider frontage housing can accept frontage parking whilst still allowing a reasonable area for soft landscaping



Frontage parking with shared drives - useful where it is desirable to limit pavement crossovers eg. fronting main roads or to avoid existing trees.



Parking to the side can allow the housing to be set forward containing the street.



A shared drive to garaging at the rear allows the housing to be set forward and closely spaced maintaining street enclosure.



Wider frontage housing can accept a garage and still provide a significant main window at ground floor.



Basement/rear courtyard parking should be secure and well managed.

**Secure cycle parking should be incorporated in a convenient location within developments.**

- Secure cycle storage can encourage people to cycle rather than drive.

**Car parking should not dominate developments. The manner and level of car parking will be judged on the merits of each situation and context. Parking should however be located where it can be supervised. Initiatives such as local pool cars, car free tenures and selling parking spaces separately from the dwellings will be encouraged.**

- The manner and level of parking provision can allow higher densities where this is appropriate with more amenity space and more active frontages and streets.
- Over provision of car parking can encourage car use and spoil the quality of a place.
- High parking provision is not appropriate where alternative means of transport are readily available.
- Housing which costs less without parking can encourage people not to own a car, can increase densities and provide more affordable housing.

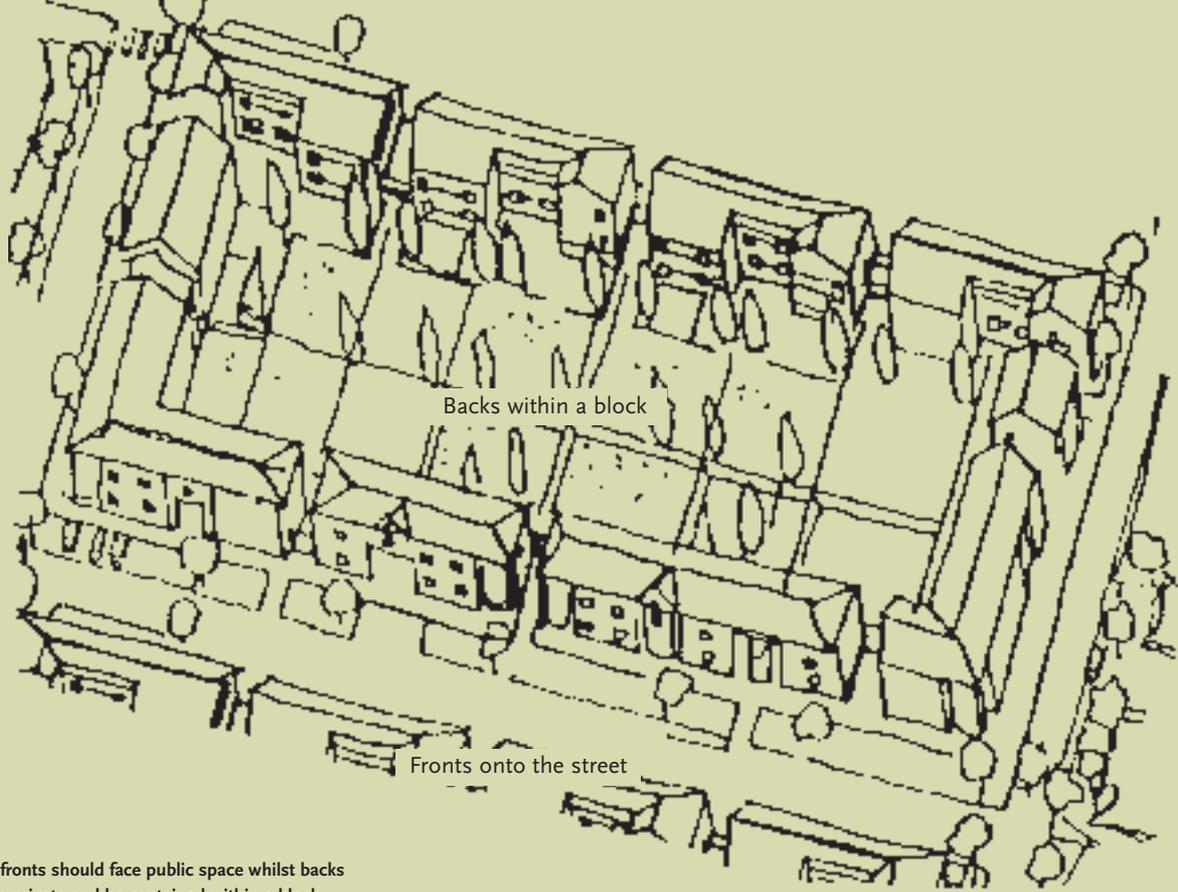
**Whilst basement or rear courtyard parking can avoid dominating the frontage with parked cars, it should be secure, well designed and properly managed. There should be a particularly good justification for rear courtyard parking for family housing, as it can be difficult to achieve a satisfactory result.**

- Unless gated and well managed, rear courtyard parking can allow unauthorised access to the rear of properties and in the case of family houses in particular, can reduce back garden sizes and impact on amenity.



Secure cycle storage should be provided.





Building fronts should face public space whilst backs should be private and be contained within a block.

SKETCH BY GEORGE LEICH

# 3 safe places, private spaces

**AS WELL** as being able to move around easily people should feel the place is safe and attractive as they do so. Streets and public spaces should be designed so as many people as possible want to use them helping to foster a sense of community. At the same time people living in these areas need to feel their homes are private whilst having convenient access to facilities.



Fronts facing public space provide natural surveillance making places feel safer.

### DEFINE THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE REALM

There should be a clear definition of the public and private realm. Building fronts should overlook public space, including streets, parks and canals. In many cases public space in front of dwellings should also be defined by low front boundary walls/hedging rather than leave an open front garden area (exact boundary treatment will often be set by the context). Backs should be private and face other backs within a development block allowing secure spaces such as courtyards or gardens to be formed. Backing onto public space should be avoided.

- Fronts facing public space provide natural surveillance so streets feel safer.
- Fronts improve the visual character of the public realm.
- Low front walls provide definition to the public realm as well as a defensible space (this may be inappropriate in some areas such as the Jewellery Quarter where development is usually at the back of pavement).
- Backs facing backs within a block increases security and privacy and can provide a quiet amenity space.
- The rear of properties with high fences and walls backing onto public space are visually disruptive and fail to create a sense of place. They also reduce overlooking of public areas and can compromise security and privacy.



Backing onto public space detracts from the public realm and can compromise security and privacy.



Garages and bin stores deaden the ground floor.

In most cases buildings should reinforce and define streets and spaces and follow a coherent building line, usually set from the context. Some allowance can be made for corners, relief in massing and entrance features.

- Buildings directly facing public space, with a coherent building line increase legibility and overlooking of the street, and provide a sense of enclosure.

The same principles of defining public and private space equally apply to backland development. Whilst backland development within an established area may often be acceptable, fronts should not face backs and developments should not be built in tandem i.e. where a new dwelling is in the grounds of an existing property sharing the same highway access (both common shortcomings). Proposals should also consider whether a new link would be possible/desirable rather than a cul-de-sac. Additionally, the effect on the existing street frontage and neighbouring buildings, local character, existing trees/landscaping, satisfactory access and the amenity of neighbouring occupants are of prime importance.



- Backland development can be a useful form of infill housing such as bringing derelict land into use. However a high standard of design and innovation following the principles in this document is required to overcome any constraints.

The large steps in the building line provide a deadening effect on the public realm and fail to define the street.



Windows add life to the ground floor.



Windows and 'active' rooms should face the public realm.

**BUILD ACTIVE FRONTS AND PRIVATE BACKS**

Frontages should be as 'active' as possible particularly at ground floor. Windows to active rooms such as living room and kitchen windows should face public space. Features such as bathrooms, bin stores, garages and blank walls should not dominate the street.

- Rooms such as living rooms and kitchens provide the most potential surveillance of public space. Bathrooms, bin stores and garages provide no surveillance and deaden the street where they dominate.

The main access to buildings should be from the public realm with well-defined entrances at frequent intervals. Entrances - the transition between public and private space - should be designed to be obvious and accessible.

- More entrance points can encourage more life and activity onto the street. This can make places feel more safe and secure.

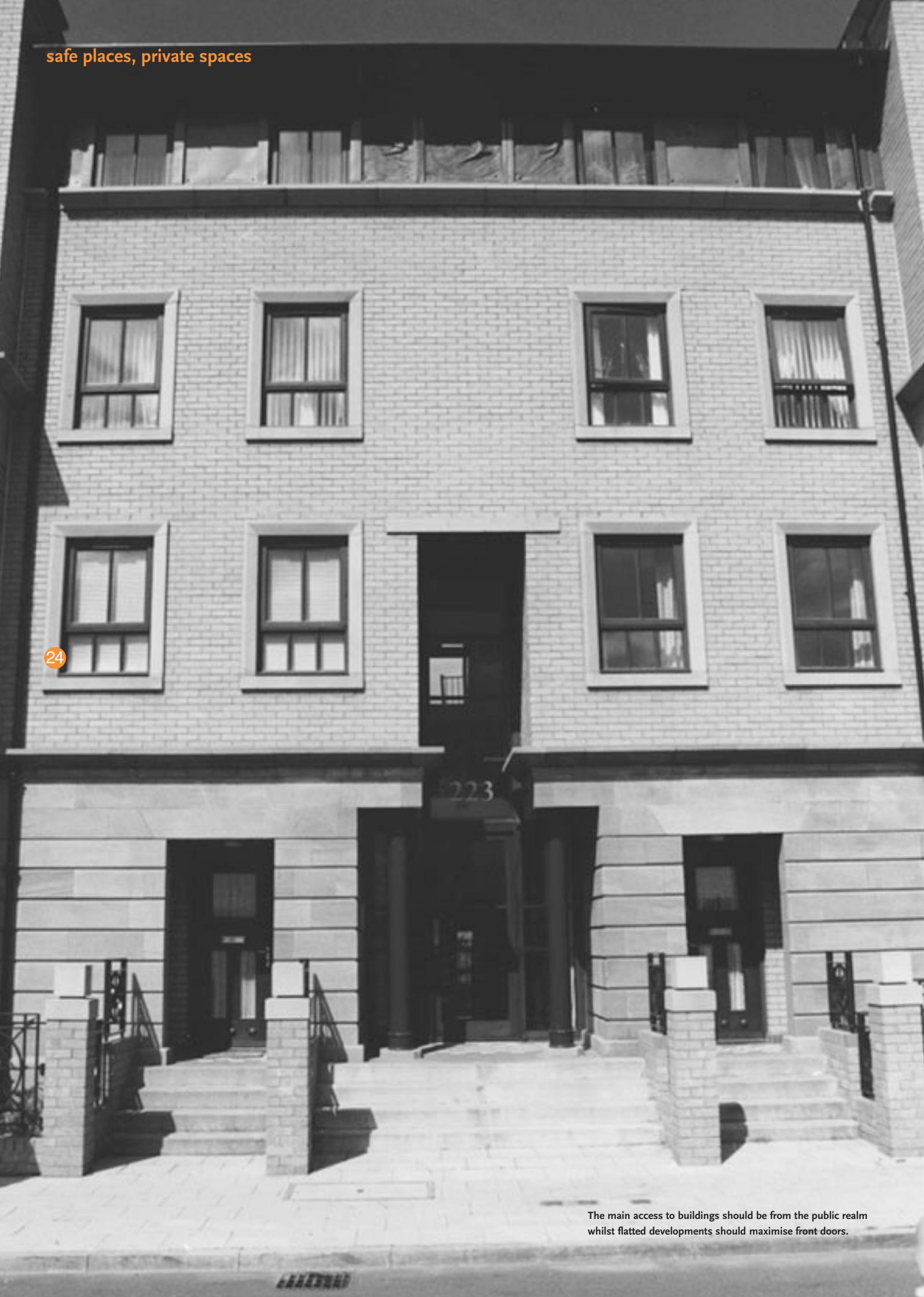
**Flatted developments should maximise front doors onto the street and ground floor flats should generally have separate entrances.**

- Ground floor flats with their own entrances maximises activity and minimises units accessed from a common stair giving people more control.
- Separate entrances for the ground floor also offers more flexibility such as future conversion to other uses such as shops or the creation of live/work units.

Frontages should be as 'active' as possible particularly at ground floor.

safe places, private spaces

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The main access to buildings should be from the public realm whilst flatted developments should maximise front doors.



Blank gable ends should generally be avoided.



Traditional corner solution using a double fronted house.



Specially designed corner house.



Corner turned with flats.

Where there is a slope, buildings should sit on 'real ground' and step down the hill if it is desirable to go across rather than along ground contours. Large monolithic 'slabs' are not acceptable.

- Stepping down the hill is visually desirable, allows ground floor entrances and windows and avoids blank walls at ground level.

Corners should be built positively to enhance legibility and visual surveillance of public space. Blank gable ends and large areas of blank wall should be avoided. Significant overlooking at the rear should be designed out and garden sizes for corner turning houses will be judged flexibly with proper justification. (see also 'building for the future').

- Corners are prominent and important features that help to orientate people and enhance the identity of a place. Badly designed corners are particularly noticeable and detract from the townscape.
- Blank gables and walls can deaden the street and reduce surveillance as well as compromising security and rear privacy.
- Corner plots can be more difficult to avoid overlooking of neighbouring rear gardens although this can be solved through careful design. Adequate garden sizes may also be difficult to achieve. However the benefit of avoiding blank gable ends by turning the corner with a building frontage as well as increased security and privacy to the rear can often compensate for this.



Buildings should sit on 'real ground' and step down the hill.



**Adequate privacy on the private side of the development i.e. the rear, will have to be demonstrated.**

- It is important for residents to enjoy rear privacy to safeguard their amenity and allow their private space to be useable. Distance separation (particularly for family houses with gardens), screening, window size and style, orientation and location of rooms and circulation space are some of the factors to consider.

**Features such as bay windows, balconies and roof terraces should be encouraged as long as they relate to the context and do not significantly compromise the privacy of neighbouring occupants. (e.g. by allowing direct overlooking of neighbouring back gardens).**

- As well as increasing amenity, these features can add liveliness and interest to the street and offer the benefit of more potential natural surveillance.



Adequate privacy to private space will have to be demonstrated.

**On the public side of the development i.e. the front, privacy is not so critical therefore front to front distances will be judged flexibly.**

- Depending on the context, streets should provide a sense of enclosure and/or follow the existing building line. Streets that offer a sense of containment can also appear more intimate and friendly and can reduce vehicle speeds.



Features such as balconies can increase amenity space and add liveliness and interest.



Narrow streets can provide a high quality environment in the right context.



Security gates to developments should generally be avoided.

### ACHIEVE SECURITY THROUGH DESIGN

Security should be achieved through careful design. Gated developments should generally be avoided.

- The overtly fortress like appearance of gates can raise the fear of crime and prevent the achievement of natural surveillance. Gates also effectively privatise areas of the city and reduce permeability. Gated developments should not be confused with gates that merely prevent access to the rear of properties including rear parking courts.

Convenient access to the rear of properties should be incorporated without compromising security. This can be achieved through secure gated access. In the case of unbroken terraced housing gated 'tunnel backs' should be used.

Access through the dwelling may be a solution so long as it is properly designed to accommodate this (e.g. a straight passage via a hallway and kitchen/utility room).

- Secure rear access allows occupants to more easily use the space at the rear for example removing garden rubbish, storage of refuse, repair and maintenance to the rear of the property, storing cycles and building garden sheds, extensions etc.



Access to the rear should be incorporated without compromising security.

## Security should be achieved through careful design.



### DESIGN ATTRACTIVE STREETS AND SPACES

New streets and public spaces should incorporate a public realm strategy in their design to make them safe, attractive and useable by many people with different needs. General aspects to consider include: local character, existing landscape features, the size and type of space, location and prominence, connections to the wider area, circulation patterns and desire lines, variety of uses surrounding the space, ratio of building height to width, design of surrounding buildings and microclimate.

More detailed design considerations include: boundaries and transitions, amount and type of seating, lighting, choice of materials, planting, level changes, public art, information and signage and management and maintenance. A management and maintenance agreement will be encouraged for shared areas not adopted by the City Council.

## Good public space enhances the city's image.

- Good public space enhances the city's image, provides a valuable amenity and improves the setting of surrounding buildings. It calls for careful design and thought about the best use of space.
- The long term success of an area is influenced by adequate management and maintenance to avoid a run down appearance. Management agreements can also avoid disputes over responsibility.



Good public space enhances the development

**Public space that is poorly located, low quality and of a form and layout that limits its usefulness will NOT be acceptable.**

- No-one benefits from left over space that serves little purpose. Amenity space should be designed as an integral and complementary part of the development.

**Boundary treatment should enhance public space. Low quality treatment such as palisade or close board fencing is seldom appropriate for a boundary to public space.**

- Good quality boundary treatments contribute to the visual character of an area, provide a good transition between public and private areas and offer security and a defensible space.

**Streets and public space should be well lit, avoiding dark corners. It is also important to consider the impact of buildings at night.**

- People use public space at all times and so should feel safe at all times. Considering the impact of a building at night at the design stage can be dramatic and enhance the city's landscape.



Poor quality space benefits no-one.



Good quality existing buildings should be re-used.

# 4 building for the future

**PLACES** should be socially, environmentally and economically sustainable. The form and layout of places can reduce car use, resource consumption and emissions as well as create successful and popular places to live. Equally buildings and spaces should also be adaptable to enhance their long-term viability; and be constructed in a way that minimises any harm to the environment.



Victorian housing has allowed for change, including loft conversions...

...or conversions to other uses.

#### DETERMINE THE IMPACT OF DEVELOPMENT

Consideration should be given in the first instance to the environmental impact of development. For example some sites may be an important wildlife or recreation resource, subject to flooding or may be located close to hazardous substances making them inappropriate to develop. Consultation with the appropriate bodies will be required.

- It is important we do not lose irreplaceable ecosystems, important recreational resources or subject future occupiers to unnecessary dangers.

#### RE-USE EXISTING BUILDINGS

Good quality existing buildings should always be considered for re-use rather than demolition and replacement.

- Re-using buildings avoids the energy and resource depletion associated with providing a new building.
- Retaining and re-using existing buildings can avoid wholesale clearance of areas, the loss of local character and the break-up of communities.
- Many older buildings can be significant to the community and have historic and townscape importance.
- A mix of building ages can offer more variety in the character of an area.
- A mix of building ages can potentially lead to a mix of rental profiles/sales values and dwelling types offering more choice to people.

#### CONSIDER FUTURE CHANGE

The form and layout of developments should consider future change for example allowing links not currently available (see also moving around easily).

- It is essential that short-term decisions do not prejudice beneficial future changes.

Good quality existing buildings should always be considered for re-use.



Dwellings should allow for personalisation.



Rear gardens should be usable for a number of activities.

Easily maintained buildings that allow flexibility will be encouraged. The structure and layout of properties should offer the ability to enlarge and adapt. Lifetime homes go some way towards achieving this. Room sizes will also be judged flexibly if the dwelling size as a whole is adequate and it can be demonstrated that the rooms are useable, especially in a number of ways e.g. a bedroom to a study, gym or lounge etc.

- Easily maintained buildings last longer and avoid creating a run down image.
- Flexible building plans allow people to more easily adapt and personalise their properties as well as allowing conversion to other uses. This makes for more sustainable places.
- Good space planning can avoid wasted space and ensure the maximum flexibility of properties.
- Internal space is increasingly being used in a greater variety of ways, Birmingham has a diverse population therefore it is important that housing design can accommodate varying and changing practical and cultural needs e.g. provision of large house types with two separate living rooms where required.

Tall buildings for residential use outside the city centre should be used sparingly and have a very strong justification. There will also be an expectation that lifts will be required for multi-level accommodation.

- Although taller buildings can increase densities, higher floors are less accessible reducing their flexibility.
- It is often the case that comparable densities can be achieved with low to medium rise due to the need to space tall buildings further apart to avoid over shadowing and overlooking.
- Lifts to upper floors provide easier access for everyone especially the less mobile.

Proposals should consider how easy it is for the dwelling to be personalised by the occupier without detriment to the streetscape.

- Personalising properties allows people to identify with their house, accommodate their needs and can also add to the variety and vibrancy of the street.

Private amenity space to the rear of properties should demonstrate that it is useable for a number of activities, particularly for traditional family houses. This may include an adequate area for a future extension to the house (see Appendix A for garden size standards).

- The rear of properties gives householders an area for private leisure and other activities including the enlargement of dwellings to meet changing needs. These opportunities should not be limited by inadequate space.





Where there is limited or no conventional private amenity space proposed such as back gardens this may be acceptable particularly for apartments and higher density housing types. However, strong design reasons must be given (in the accompanying design statement) and other forms of useable space provided. This should be appropriate to the site and dwelling type but could include shared courtyards (including 'decked' courtyards above parking areas), roof terraces and balconies. Streets such as a 'home zone' and nearby parks and public squares may also compensate for a lack of private amenity space. Corner house plots may also be judged more flexibly (see also 'safe places, private spaces').

## Innovative housing solutions should be encouraged.

- Innovative housing solutions should be encouraged both to offer choice as well as provide higher densities where appropriate.
- Lifestyles today do not always require conventional private amenity space such as back gardens.
- Corner house plots can be more difficult to achieve a sizeable garden space. However the benefit of avoiding blank walls and enhancing security and privacy by turning the corner with a building frontage may compensate for this.

**Provided there is no conflict with existing/proposed trees, underground services such as electricity cables should be laid where they are easily accessible with minimal disruption e.g. under pavements with removable paving. Shared service trenches will also be encouraged.**

- Since street patterns can survive for centuries, services under the street are usually the most flexible, avoiding expensive re-routing to accommodate redevelopment.
- Laying services under removable paving results in less visual disruption if future access to services is required.
- Shared service trenches minimise land take and costs and make it easier to avoid trees and other obstructions.

### MINIMISE ENVIRONMENTAL HARM

**New and refurbished buildings should minimise environmental effects. Measures to incorporate include high standards of thermal and noise insulation, environmentally friendly materials, conservation measures including provision for segregating waste, recycling and compost bins, and the use of alternative forms of energy.**

- A safer and cleaner environment benefits everyone.
- Low energy/water use reduces the consumption of declining natural resources and the level of environmentally harmful emissions.
- Low energy use and heating/water bills can free income for other uses.
- A good standard of noise insulation makes flats, terraced housing and mixed use development more attractive and sustainable.



'Intelligent' and 'green' house designed by Integer which uses 50% of the energy of a conventional house and 70% of the water.

Photo: BRE Professional Imaging



Retention of landscape features such as important trees can enhance developments.

The design of buildings and spaces should consider the local microclimate such as ensuring adequate sunlight and shade where required and avoiding turbulence from high buildings.

- Care in orientation and design can reduce energy use, heating bills and the use of fossil fuels and harmful emissions in buildings. Comfortable buildings and spaces are also more popular - ensuring their long-term success.

The orientation and design of dwellings to maximise daylight and solar gain should be considered e.g. ensuring habitable rooms receive sunlight. This shouldn't however be at the expense of good urban design. (see also 'safe places, private spaces').

- Care in orientation and design can reduce energy use, heating bills and the use of fossil fuels and harmful emissions.

The use of sustainable drainage/water systems will be encouraged.

- The use of sustainable drainage can limit the waste of water, reduce ground water pollution and the risk of flooding.

### 'GREEN THE CITY'

Natural features such as important trees, wetlands and other valuable natural features should generally be retained and sensitively incorporated into developments.

- Natural features provide important ecological and wildlife habitats as well as contributing to the special character of a place.

Depending on the context, planting new trees and well conceived and designed landscaped areas such as squares and parks will be desirable and help to green the city. This may be required by legal agreement. Long term management and maintenance schemes should also be adopted.

- The 'greening' of cities can enhance their attractiveness as well as their ecological value.



A stormwater wetland and balancing pond forms the focus of a housing redevelopment in London.

Photo: The Environment Agency



Nodal points (where routes meet) are often marked by corner buildings and commercial uses.

# build on local character

**MANY** developments in recent years have ignored the local context. Examples where the road is designed first with standard house types made to fit around it can be seen all over the country. Similarly, street patterns can be confusing with dead ends and pedestrian and vehicular routes often separated. This undermines local character and the legibility of places making it difficult for people to find their way around. Proposals should therefore demonstrate that they have considered the local context and the legibility of the layout.

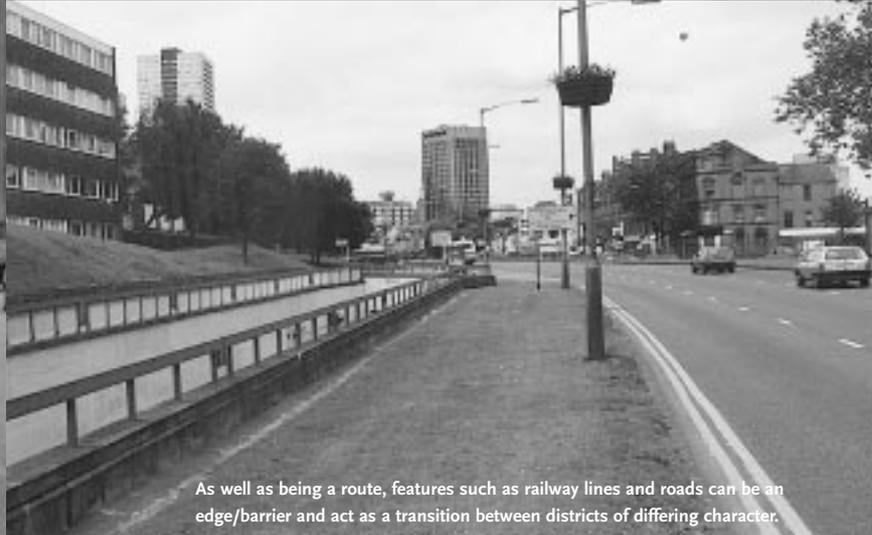
This does not necessarily mean that standard house types should not be used, but it does require types that can be adapted more easily to suit the situation. It would also be beneficial for developers to have a greater range of types available to take account of more situations such as corner houses, wide frontage houses and 3 storey houses.



Existing routes and uses should be considered.  
Focusing on landmarks is often beneficial.



build on local character



As well as being a route, features such as railway lines and roads can be an edge/barrier and act as a transition between districts of differing character.

## High quality contemporary design that has evolved from the local context and culture should be the aim.

In certain circumstances character may conflict with the other principles, in such cases solutions will be judged on their own merits. Good planning and urban design reasons may occasionally justify a development that departs significantly from its context for particularly high quality innovative proposals. It may also be the case that there is little of positive significance to build on. There is then the opportunity to create a new place with its own distinctive character.

This guide does not prescribe solutions for every detailed aspect of building in relation to local character. There is a danger that design guide 'solutions' with the tick and cross approach can themselves become standard solutions used everywhere. It is the aim to build on local character not necessarily copy it. High quality contemporary design that has evolved from the local context and culture should be the aim.



High quality contemporary design should be the aim.



Street patterns and widths can vary enormously and require a differing response.



### STUDY THE CONTEXT

Where development is considered appropriate, the positive and negative characteristics of the site and the local context must be analysed to determine their special qualities.

General features to consider include existing routes and uses, nodal points, landmarks, edges/barriers, topography, existing trees and natural features, historic buildings and archaeological features, views, street patterns and widths including historic street patterns, building heights including floor to ceiling heights, scale, massing and building type.

More detailed design elements include vertical/horizontal rhythm, relationship of solid to void, skyline, materials, corner treatment, colour, windows, doors, wall/ground level details, landscaping, boundary treatment and public art.

Reference to this analysis should be included in the design statement. The extent of the analysis will depend on the nature and scale of the development. Development affecting listed buildings and conservation areas will require particular care and thoroughness in terms of its relationship.

- A careful analysis of the local character will inform the best response to the context resulting in a more successful and appropriate development.
- Popular places are often familiar and distinctive. Local distinctiveness is what gives an area its character and helps people find their way about the city.

Plot widths, vertical/horizontal rhythm and features such as windows are important considerations.

Left: Narrow plot, vertical rhythm, narrow arched windows.

Right: Wide plot, horizontal rhythm, wide industrial window panes.





Building height, massing and housing types should vary according to the context.

#### RESPOND TO THE CONTEXT

The design should reinforce and evolve local characteristics that are considered positive. Care should be taken not to detrimentally affect positive townscape and landscape features including neighbouring buildings, natural features and uses e.g. by significant overshadowing, removal of important trees, loss of important buildings and so on. Local characteristics considered poor in terms of urban design and which undermine the overall character of an area, should not be used as a precedent e.g. buildings that back onto the public realm or over-scaled buildings.

- Responding to the context can ensure the unique identity of a place is not harmed as well as avoid any potential adverse impact on neighbouring buildings, landscape and uses.



Responding to the context can ensure the unique identity of a place is not harmed.

build on local character



Skylines: Victorian residential skyline - vertical punctuation.

40



Landscaping and public realm design should be appropriate to the context





Skylines: Victorian industrial skyline - little vertical punctuation apart from landmark church.

**Character Analysis - large scale example.**  
The context (**positive characteristics**): Linked streets fronted by terraced housing; mixed use; regular building line; small set-backs; street trees, and an urban character generally.



Poor response to context: Culs-de-sac; backs exposed to public open space; suburban housing and landscaping; arbitrary curved streets.



Character Analysis - small scale example. What not to do. The building line and vertical rhythm is broken, it is out of scale and inflexible parking standards have caused cars to dictate the design.

How it could have been done. The building line, scale and vertical rhythm is respected with a modern interpretation of the Victorian character. On street parking is available rather than private drives.





**Character Analysis - creating a new identity.**

Dutch town extension built to a high standard of contemporary design. A broad range of dwelling types provide a modern high quality residential district. A range of street types, focal points, land marks and edges make it easy to find your way around. Unfortunately, there is little in the way of mixed uses to truly make this a 'place for living'.

# A

## appendix

### numerical standards

**THE MAIN** focus should always be on addressing the principles described in the preceding chapters. Careful design rather than a blanket application of numerical standards can often address concerns such as privacy and amenity. The objective behind the standards is what is important rather than the standards themselves. The City Council does however reserve the right to apply numerical standards if it is not possible or considered appropriate to tackle amenity and other concerns purely by design. This will often be where their application is considered necessary to protect the amenity of existing residents from the effects of new developments.

Even if concerns can be designed out, standards can be a useful starting point in the design process by providing a rough rule of thumb. For example 21m between rear building faces allows for a reasonable garden length of 10.5m as well as some degree of privacy without significant screening. Similarly 1.8m high screening between rear gardens will ensure that most people cannot overlook neighbouring gardens from ground level.

The following standards may apply with some more frequently applied than others depending on individual circumstances including quality of design and the context. However proposals that only accord with these standards without addressing the main issues and principles will not be acceptable.

- 21m between building faces for 2 storey dwellings and 27.5m for 3 storeys and above and /or where main living room/kitchen windows above ground level overlook existing conventional dwellings. The separation distance should be increased by 2 metres for every 1 metre rise in ground level between new and existing dwellings. This standard will be more strictly applied at the rear rather than the front.
- Single storey development is not so critical in terms of overlooking from upper storeys and will be judged on its merits.
- 5m per storey set back where new development with main windows overlooking existing private space is proposed. This applies independently of the minimum spatial separation requirement.
- 12.5m minimum distance between windowed elevations and opposing 1 and 2 storey flank walls.  
15.5m for 3 storey flank walls. Where a flank wall will be situated at a higher level than a windowed elevation, the separation distance should be increased by 1metre for every 1 metre change in ground level.
- The erection of screen walling or fencing of at least 1.8 metres in height on the appropriate boundary, unless adequate mature screening or fencing already exists.
- Bedroom sizes in family accommodation. These areas may include fitted wardrobes but should exclude airing cupboards and bulkheads:
  - 12.6 sq.m (135 sq.ft) - first double bedroom.
  - 10.26 sq.m (110 sq.ft) - second double bedroom.
  - 6.56 sq.m (70 sq.ft) - single bedrooms.
- 70 sq.m minimum garden size for family accommodation  
52 sq.m for 2 bed houses (permitted development rights may be removed)  
42 sq.m for 1 bed houses (permitted development rights may be removed)  
30 sq m per unit for flats and other developments providing communal amenity space.
- 45 degree code (especially in relation to existing properties).



appendix  
further reading

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# places for living