



Timekeeper's Square, Salford. © Historic England Archive. Image reference DP275530.

Design in the Historic Environment

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Here you can find information on good practice for design when making changes to the built historic environment through development: including our role, design codes basic principles and case studies.

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Historic England's role in promoting high-quality design

The reforms proposed in the Planning White Paper (Planning for the Future, August 2020) include a focus on incentivising design quality, in part through a greater role for design coding and design standards.

Historic England's regional presence and statutory role in commenting on planning applications for development give it a powerful influence in encouraging and facilitating new development which is based on an understanding of each site's unique history, character and context, and thus creating distinctive new neighbourhoods.

Building on past experience with the Building in Context initiative and more recent success of Streets for All, Historic England is well-placed to play a leading role in promoting high-quality design in historic places.

The Places Strategy (<https://historicengland.org.uk/content/docs/planning/he-places-strategy-2019/>), published in 2019, describes Historic England's role in place making and sets out recommendations for developing this role and linked actions. Some of these are related to improving its capacity and capability to promote good-quality design in the historic environment. One change that has already been implemented is that Historic England's Urban Panel has become the Historic Places Panel. This provides a broad spectrum of independent expertise to help local authorities and others engage in the regeneration and revitalisation of historic places.

The National Planning Policy Framework

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was first published in 2012 and last revised in 2019. Chapter 12 of the NPPF (Paras 124 -130) concerns 'Well Designed Places'. This emphasises the importance of setting clear expectations regarding design quality and refers to the role of design policies, design guidance, design review panels, pre-application discussions and workshops, neighbourhood plans and frameworks such as Building for Life. Para 127 (c) states that planning policies and decisions should ensure (inter alia) that developments are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities).

Permission should be refused for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions, taking into account any local design standards or style guides in plans or supplementary planning documents. Conversely, where the design of a development accords with clear expectations in plan policies, design should not be used by the decisionmaker as a valid reason to object to development.

NPPF paragraph 130

Chapter 16 'Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment' advises that historic environment strategies should take account of the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.

National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG) is online guidance which sets out how the government expects the NPPF policies to be applied. It covers design matters in the section on 'Design: Process and tools'.

The NPPG endorses the [National Design Guide](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/962113/National_Design_Guide.pdf) (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/962113/National_Design_Guide.pdf) and covers various other matters such as strategic design policies, neighbourhood plans, local design guides, masterplans and design codes.

Design Codes

Design Codes are now increasingly being used in guiding large- and small-scale development schemes. They are defined in the NPPF as 'A set of illustrated design requirements that provide specific, detailed parameters for the physical development of a site

or area. The graphic and written components of the code should build upon a design vision, such as a masterplan or other design and development framework for a site or area.'

The National Model Design Code was issued by MHCLG in January 2021.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/957205/National_

Historic England has directly engaged in providing advice on the production of design codes, developing a programme of research in support of emerging design-related policy and guidance. This includes the commissioning of a project from Node aimed at understanding how the historic environment has been reflected in design codes to date, and developing approaches to aid the future creation of design codes for the historic environment.

Read the 2020 report on design codes commissioned from Node.

<https://historicengland.org.uk/content/docs/planning/design-codes-and-the-historic-environment/>

Principles for good design

Below are eight principles from 'Building in Context' and the corresponding statements taken from the National Design Guide:

Building in Context principles	Equivalent points in the National Design Guide
1: Baseline Understanding: Start with an assessment of the value of retaining what is there	All local design guides and codes will need to set out a baseline understanding of the local context and an analysis of local character and identity
2: Context: Relate to the geography and history of the place and lie of the land	Identifying the existing features of the site and the wider area highlights opportunities for the design of new developments to link well into their context and enhance these features for the benefit of new and existing residents
3: Character: Be informed by its own significance so that its character and identity will be appropriate to its use and context	Well-designed new development is influenced by an appreciation and understanding of vernacular, local or regional character, including existing built form, landscape and local architectural precedents
4: Streets and Spaces: Sit happily in the pattern of existing development and the routes through and around it	Street types will depend on establishing an appropriate relationship with the pattern, sizes and proportions of existing streets in the local area
5: Views: Respect important views.	Well-designed new development is influenced by views, vistas and landmarks
6: Scale: Respect the scale of neighbouring buildings	Built form is determined by good urban design principles that combine layout, form and scale in a way that responds positively to the context
7: Materials: Use materials and building methods which are	Materials should be practical, durable, affordable and

as high quality as those used in existing buildings

attractive. Choosing the right materials can greatly help new development to fit harmoniously with its surroundings

8: Visual Composition: Create new views and juxtapositions which add to the variety and texture of the setting

Well-designed new development is influenced by:

- the composition of street scenes, individual buildings and their elements;
- the height, scale, massing and relationships between buildings;
- views, vistas and landmarks;
- roofscapes;
- soft landscape, landscape setting and backdrop;
- light, shade, sunshine and shadows; and
- colours, textures, shapes and patterns.

Find out more

Historic England have commissioned reports on design in the historic environment and several related issues:



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