



**RTPI**

Royal Town Planning Institute

**RTPI  
Research  
Paper**

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# **PLANNING AND DESIGN QUALITY**

**Creating places where we want to live,  
work and spend time**

Cover image: "PLACE/Ladywell construction" (c) Rogers Stirk Harbour Partners

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# 1. Executive Summary

The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) has always seen design quality and place making as being at the heart of planning. However, the Institute's survey of planners in early 2019 revealed that while the vast majority of planners want to engage more in both, they consider that the current system makes this difficult. In this paper, we report more of the findings from this survey, and offer recommendations for improving design quality and place making through planning.

## Survey findings

In the spring of 2019, the RTPI surveyed planners on issues relating to design. The following are the key findings from their responses:

- At least half of professional planners reported having limited influence in housing design and an overwhelming 87% wanted to have more say.
- The majority (77%) of respondents believe that design is of equal importance to factors such as affordability, and the availability of infrastructure; only 12% see it as a minor consideration.
- The majority of respondents (57%) use some kind of tool or process to assess design quality but many express the need for more national consistency and standards. 86% of respondents want the Government to further promote design codes and style guides.
- Creating quality design goes beyond the concept of securing beauty; a more holistic focus should be on delivering sustainable places and communities.
- Any new definition of design quality should not include reference to style or beauty, as there are clear, objective criteria against which the quality of design can be assessed. Design quality should focus on problem-solving. It should have regard to inclusivity, consider wider needs and impacts, and secure accessible, safe and useable development. It should result in contextual, deliverable buildings and spaces that draw on the qualities of a place, and that create new layers of history through contemporary solutions.
- There are very many sources of evidence for homes and communities that have achieved sustainable and walkable densities, strong public support, high levels of well-being, and environmental sustainability. Evidence and good practice compiled by the Commission for the Built Environment (CABE, now the Design Council) is still relevant now, in contributing to improving design quality to help alleviate the housing crisis and address other current planning issues. Award-winning, housing-led projects endorsed by local communities and residents - and international sustainability exemplars - provide further guidance on good practice.
- Recognising that there are resource implications, carefully conceived and well-executed collaborative engagement processes can help to involve communities and stakeholders early on, and provide legitimacy to final outcomes.
- There are great benefits but also some limitations to using 'design methods' (masterplanning and design codes being the most common). Having too much design guidance in place can restrict the ability for new and vibrant places to be delivered.

However, ill-crafted or no design guidance can lead to poorly-designed places. Masterplanning should be a design-led, collaborative process, contributed to by government, local planning authorities and communities. Masterplans need debate and co-production to be effective and implementable. Design codes are most successful if they are evidence-based and localised, and drafted by urban designers or architects (depending on their content) using clear language. Planning authority area-wide codes are not as effective, although they can help speed development through planning, where there are smaller sites likely to be brought forward by SMEs.

- A step change in the approach to quality design in the built environment is needed; it should be possible to achieve in the short term. This will require support from the development sector.

## Conclusions and recommendations

Based on the survey outcomes, the following are the RTPI's recommendations for improving design quality in the built environment:

- Consideration should be given to extending the term 'quality design' to 'urban design quality', to bring the spaces between buildings into the definition and help avoid giving the impression that the planning system should be concerned principally with architectural quality.
- Higher benchmarks in design ought to be recognised by Government as essential for creating places where people want to live, work and spend time – the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is not yet worded strongly enough. For example, the NPPF and national Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) need to explain how the development industry can and should embrace innovative design, alongside viability.
- Quality design should be given appropriate weight on appeal. The NPPF therefore needs to be revised to be more explicit about the degree of priority to be given to each of its policies; local planning authorities having a 5-year housing land supply currently appears to be at the expense of everything else, including design quality.
- Whenever design quality is identified as a key issue, the PPG should encourage high levels of 'end-to-end' engagement from developer teams and local planning authorities alike, from pre-application discussion and negotiations, through to the discharge of conditions, including liaison with design officers, and/ or panel design review of projects.
- The awaited PPG on well-designed places should explain how independent design review panels can be key to ensuring that design quality is considered in terms of built form, accessibility and landscape. The timing of design review is key; panel advice should not be sought too late in the day, Use available tools to help achieve design quality.
- The new PPG should reference - and provide access to - the vast resource of published material available for assisting the development sector in ensuring design quality in the built environment. National guidance should be given on adhering to simple architectural principles, as these are more likely to achieve design quality. This could provide the consistent approach to design quality that is needed across England, providing a loose framework that each local planning authority can then adapt to its own local character and

setting.

- Existing permitted development rights for changes of use to residential should be abolished (and proposed new rights for upward extensions, and offices to residential rebuilds, not introduced).
- The role of Homes England in promoting quality design should be boosted. For example, the public body could create guidance and publicise examples of best practice for design codes etc., arising from the new generation of urban extensions and garden settlements that are coming forward.
- Quality design should be a key factor in formulating and implementing local planning policies, given that it can: improve health; create more environmentally sustainable places; attract investment; and support civic pride. Design-based statutory plan policies should then be used to prepare more detailed supplementary planning documents (SPDs).
- Design-led highways' policies and standards should replace rigidly-defined and applied standards. Additional Government and planning fee income resources should be part-used to focus on local highways' departments, to ensure officers have integrated training and an understanding of good design, leading to a move away from a car-led design approach to one that is landscape-led, interrelated with planning and that prioritises pedestrians and cyclists.
- Councillors' design expertise should be enhanced with training, and council resourcing increased, to help address the hollowing-out of design capability and understanding within local government.
- Up-to-date IT tools should be brought more into everyday use in pre-application and planning application determination processes. 3D models of designs should be used too, to test their quality prior to planning submission stage.
- Post-occupancy evaluation should be undertaken by planning professionals, with councillor visits encouraged. Observations should be used to inform future policy making and decision taking.
- To raise the standard of housing design, consideration should be given by Government to a new validation requirement for full applications and reserved matters, this being a site specific 'Housing Design Quality Statement' that would detail the design of individual dwellings, their construction and materials, and the 'place' that they would create.
- The teaching of urban design principles and practice on both architecture and planning courses should be strengthened in tandem, to increase an appreciation of context and sustainable development. From the start of higher education, architecture and planning courses should explore joint ways that the education system for both professions could develop opportunities for shared teaching, particularly in early years, so as to ensure that each has a clearer understanding of the other.

## 2. Introduction

More than 760 RTPI members responded to the online survey on design that was undertaken earlier this year, the findings of which are set out in this research paper. It has been prepared following the Institute's detailed May 2019 submission in response to the Building Better Building Beautiful Commission's Call for Evidence<sup>1</sup>. That submission reflected not only the survey findings, but also wider RTPI views on quality design.

**“The [survey] findings will demonstrate to the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission, and the Government, that planners stand ready to tackle the challenges of poor quality design and build of housing.**

**"The enthusiastic response to the survey shows how much our members care about housing design and want the Institute to do more to help them bring about places that are attractive, functional and of high quality to live in.**

**“There are key issues to do with the commerciality and culture of the wider housing market which take time to change. But there are things the Institute can do independent of that, for example looking into how we can provide our members with better training, and talking to the Planning Inspectorate about how rulings can give more ground to design.” (Victoria Hills, RTPI Chief Executive)**

The survey found that at least half of professional planners had limited influence in housing design: an overwhelming 87% wanted to have more say in this area. But while planners generally welcome the Government's focus on improving the design of housing developments, only 11% think that design trumps other considerations in helping communities accept new development. The majority (77%) of respondents believe design's importance is equal to other factors such as affordability and availability of infrastructure; 12% see it as a minor consideration.

The survey also found that the majority of respondents (57%) use some kind of tool or process to assess design quality - many express the need for more national consistency and standards.

86% of respondents want the Government to do more to promote the use of design codes and style guides.

The survey findings and the RTPI response to the Building Better Building Beautiful Commission's Call for Evidence will inform the Institute's efforts to enhance the profile and influence of planning on this vital issue. From both the survey and the submission to the Commission, the key issues and potential solutions identified for achieving design quality are summarised below.

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<sup>1</sup> Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/building-better-building-beautiful-commission>

# 3. Achieving quality design

There are stronger, more suitable and more effective broad objectives for achieving quality design than ‘securing beauty’.

The Building Better Building Beautiful Commission (‘the Commission’) was just one of the Conservative Government’s initiatives in 2018 to boost housing supply; it followed that of ‘rewriting the planning rulebook to strengthen expectations for design quality and community engagement when planning for development’ (see the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) announcement of the Commission on 3 November 2018<sup>2</sup>).

The Commission itself had three aims for taking ‘the Government’s work further’, with none expressly referring to ‘beauty’. Instead, they are to:

- ‘promote better design and style [...] to reflect what communities want’;
- ‘explore how new settlements can be developed with greater community consent’; and
- ‘make the planning system work in support of better design and style’.

Therefore the Commission only nominally has a narrow focus on ‘beauty’; the misplaced perception having most probably evolved from a series of Policy Exchange events<sup>3</sup>, to ‘showcase the importance of beauty in the built environment’.

Despite publicity to the contrary, the Commission itself clearly and rightly has much more than a narrow concern for beauty and the aesthetic (important though that is); this reflects all that has been learnt by built environment professionals in the years since the successor to the Royal Fine Arts Commission - the Commission for the Built Environment (CABE) - was established in 1999. In some RTPI members’ views, CABE held an invaluable advisory role to government and extensively beyond on architecture, urban design and public space. This role diminished, once public funding was withdrawn in 2010 (with CABE then being merged with the Design Council in 2011 and since January 2019, it no longer being a named entity).

RTPI members have said that there is much to learn from ‘the CABE years’: they are concerned that the Treasury, MHCLG and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport are not aware of the extent of CABE’s knowledge and expertise, nor the research, guidance and advice<sup>4</sup> that it generated for creating sustainable places and communities. The member view is that its material is timeless and as highly relevant now as it ever was, in terms of contributing to improving design quality to help alleviate the housing crisis and address other current planning issues. CABE’s ‘By

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<sup>2</sup> MHCLG (2019). James Brokenshire: building better and beautiful will deliver more homes. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/james-brokenshire-building-better-and-beautiful-will-deliver-more-homes>

<sup>3</sup> Policy Exchange (2018). Building More, Building Beautiful.: <https://policyexchange.org.uk/publication/building-more/>

<sup>4</sup> The National Archives, Cabe. [https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100913142554f\\_/http://www.cabe.org.uk/resources](https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100913142554f_/http://www.cabe.org.uk/resources)

Design<sup>5</sup> is an example of guidance, published by the-then Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions in 2000, that most certainly endures.

With this background in mind, RTPI members consider that it is important to properly define what is meant by design quality; it is not necessarily the case that design quality means aesthetic quality.

**“It is important to properly define what you mean by design quality. A very ordinary brick box without any particularly distinguishable aesthetic identity can have design quality because it is low energy, well-composed and a well-planned place to live for it intended occupiers. I think there is a tendency to assume design quality means aesthetic quality.” (RTPI design survey 2019 response)**

A definition should not include reference to style or beauty, as both are subjective and cannot be objectively evaluated within a planning or design framework. Good design is not subjective; there are clear, objective criteria against which the quality of design can be assessed – yet there seems to be a reluctance to take such an approach and as a consequence, there is a widely-held view that planning should not consider design in detail.

Any definition of design quality should embrace inclusivity, as design is part of a wider development process. High quality development also needs to consider wider needs and impacts, such as supporting infrastructure (e.g. roads, public transport, parks and open space, pedestrian and cycle links, and community facilities). In addition, it needs to encompass the interiors of buildings, reflecting how people want to maximise their use of internal space (i.e. interiors should not just comply with building regulations - which do not ensure better internal space standards for new homes to assist with people's quality of life and improved mental health - or simply satisfy the nationally described space standard).

**“Design quality is therefore not just about the aesthetics of a building, or architectural style or quality, it is a much wider concept that embraces problem-solving and functionality” (RTPI design survey 2019 response)**

It is paramount too that design quality be defined in a way that secures useable and sustainable development. The definition must consider communities and reflect sustainability in recognising that schemes should last for many years. The economic benefits of new development should be recognised too, but not at the cost of good design, appropriate density/ scale and landscaping.

There is also a need for a new definition to reflect how quality design is a significant factor in determining how safe and secure a building or a place feels, and how neighbours/ the public react to it. Well-designed places tend to be respected and maintained to a better level by public and private bodies, as well as by individual tenants, residents and the public; they then encourage interaction between users which can positively add to feelings of safety and security.

Overall, RTPI members want to encourage a broad definition that results in contextual development that draws on the qualities of a place but one that also creates 'new layers of history' through contemporary solutions. Consideration should also be given to extending the term to

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<sup>5</sup> CABE (2000). By Design. Urban design in the planning system; towards better practice.  
<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110118121743/http://www.cabe.org.uk/files/by-design-urban-design-in-the-planning-system.pdf>

‘urban design quality’, to avoid giving the impression that the planning system should be concerned principally with architectural quality.

**“We should be talking about urban design quality to avoid giving the impression that the planning system should be concerned with "architectural quality" (RTPI design survey 2019 response)**

Whilst the visual appearance of a building is an important consideration, there are very many other elements – including technical and commercial deliverability - of design quality. Design quality is currently a highly subjective material consideration often given insufficient weight in determining planning applications, with the outcome being too dependent on the opinion of the decision maker. This long-running situation should not continue.

## Creating sustainable homes and communities

There are very many sources that can be used for creating homes and communities that achieve sustainable and walkable densities, strong public support, high levels of well-being and environmental sustainability. Good practice is provided by housing-led projects that have been completed, endorsed by local communities and residents, and that have since won development sector awards for their sustainability.

Two recent publications draw detailed, well-illustrated case studies of many such projects together:

- David Levitt and Jo McCafferty, ‘The Housing Design Handbook: A guide to good practice’ (second edition), Routledge 2018<sup>6</sup>
- HTA Design, Pollard Thomas Edwards (PTE), PRP and Proctor & Matthews Architects, ‘Distinctively Local’, 2019<sup>7</sup>

There are 4 exemplar cases which appear in both of the above publications.

A further key source of evidence should be the RTPI’s annual awards for ‘planning excellence’. In April 2019<sup>8</sup>, the winners, commended entries and finalists<sup>9</sup> - particularly the projects in the categories of Excellence in Planning for Homes, Small Schemes (up to 50 homes) and Large Schemes (50 or more homes) – exemplified quality design in relation to all manner of developers successfully re-using brownfield land, creating new communities of various scales and importantly, providing affordable homes as an integral or even predominant element. The projects demonstrate clearly how quality design is not only achievable in higher end housing schemes.

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<sup>6</sup>David Levitt and Jo McCafferty (2019). The Housing Design Handbook: A guide to good practice (second edition). <https://www.levittbernstein.co.uk/research-writing/housing-design-handbook-a-guide-to-good-practice-second-edition/>

<sup>7</sup> HTA Design, Pollard Thomas Edwards (PTE), PRP and Proctor & Matthews Architects (2019). Distinctively Local. <http://distinctively-local.co.uk/storage/app/media/Distinctively-Local-Fnal-Report.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> RTPI Awards for Planning Excellence (2019). <https://www.rtpi.org.uk/events/awards/awards-for-planning-excellence/>

<sup>9</sup> RTPI Awards for Planning Excellence. Winners, Commended and Finalists (2019). <https://www.rtpi.org.uk/media/3322240/Planning%20Excellence%20Brochure%20final.pdf>

## 4. International best practice

In 2015, RTPI research, 'Planning as 'market maker': How planning is used to stimulate development in Germany, France and The Netherlands'<sup>10</sup> was published<sup>11</sup>; it explores how proactive planning can improve the quantity and quality of development in the built environment. Using case studies of Dutch, German and French towns and cities, the research explored what planning in the UK could learn from overseas experience, where 'planning is charged with engaging with the market and providing responses to market failures with which a more passive, regulatory model of planning would be ill-equipped to deal'.

**'What we see from the case studies is that planning interventions that are supportive of economic growth go hand in hand with those that make great places. Good quality public spaces, efficient transport networks and attractive urban design should not be understood as coming at the expense of prosperity but rather as congruent with the economic growth that a development process animated by planning can deliver.'** (RTPI research, 'Planning as 'market maker': How planning is used to stimulate development in Germany, France and The Netherlands' 2015)

The RTPI research concludes how a proactive planning system can achieve the objectives of the broadest definition of quality design.

**'Often in the UK infrastructure provision and land assembly are reactive responses to private sector proposals for development. This prevents an overall vision being developed for an area that can achieve wider benefits, such as meeting density and volume requirements for house-building, ensuring environmental sustainability of transport and delivering quality in design. The HafenCity model shows how well-resourced, empowered planning institutions can use the full range of planning tools to deliver place outcomes that enable better long-term economic, environmental and social outcomes.'** (RTPI research, 'Planning as 'market maker': How planning is used to stimulate development in Germany, France and The Netherlands' 2015)

Beyond the RTPI's own research, there is a wealth of published information and a great deal of evidence available on place making in other countries. Perhaps now less well-publicised, there are (for example) two very relevant Swedish case studies - Västra Hamnen (a district in Malmö) and Hammarby Sjöstad, in Stockholm.

The Institute for Transportation and Development Policy (ITDP) has published 'Europe's Vibrant New Low Car(bon) Communities'<sup>12</sup>, an extensive series of case studies that include concise

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<sup>10</sup> RPTI (2015) Planning as 'market maker': How planning is used to stimulate development in Germany, France and The Netherlands. [https://www.rtpi.org.uk/media/1562925/rtpi\\_research\\_report\\_11\\_planning\\_as\\_market\\_maker\\_november\\_2015.pdf](https://www.rtpi.org.uk/media/1562925/rtpi_research_report_11_planning_as_market_maker_november_2015.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> RTPI (2015). Planning as 'market maker': How planning is used to stimulate development in Germany, France and the Netherlands. <https://www.rtpi.org.uk/knowledge/research/projects/small-project-impact-research-spire-scheme/planning-as-market-maker/>

<sup>12</sup> Institute for Transportation and Development & Development Policy, Nicole Folletta and Simon Field (2011). Europe's vibrant new low car(bon) communities <https://www.itdp.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/16.-LowCarbonCommunities-Screen.pdf>

summaries of both the new neighbourhoods at Västra Hamnen ('the western harbour') and the redevelopment of former industrial and harbour land at Hammarby Sjöstad. The case studies very clearly demonstrate how they each fully satisfy all of the sustainability criteria. The same ITDP publication includes 'lessons learnt'; regarding 'mechanisms for the delivery of policy and design measures' and participatory planning, it highlights the value of 'citizen involvement from initial masterplan consultation through to the creation of lobby groups to influence the masterplanning process' and concludes how residents and potential residents can 'play a large part in shaping car-free or car-reduced developments'.

## 5. Engaging with communities and stakeholders

Engagement can be highly effective in helping communities to accept new development. With the right timing, community engagement in the design process can be very constructive, helping local people – alongside stakeholders - to be part of setting the conditions for project success<sup>13</sup>.

From the community's and stakeholders' perspectives alike, the earlier the engagement the better – although a pitfall can be engaging too early on an emerging policy or project that is not sufficiently well-formulated to be understood clearly. There is therefore a need to balance:

- establishing what development and what types of design are more popular, by engaging local communities and other interested parties at the earliest opportunity; with
- obtaining local opinions on aspects of a community's environment that are of most value; with
- ensuring a policy or project is sufficiently far advanced to receive constructive feedback.

In setting design and development frameworks for a site or area, planners should use their emerging policy-based thinking to initiate high level planning and place making discussions. This can be by establishing collaborative multi-disciplinary and cross-sector workshops, capable of embracing iteration and challenge. Using a design champion for a third party view of engagement processes and consultation proposals can be enlightening too.

Early engagement can however raise significant resource issues for planning authorities, as substantial investment in enabling excellent communications is likely to be necessary - survey and data collection, presentation aids and 3d modelling will all have to be funded. Virtual Reality and similar technology should be used with key stakeholders, to improve the ability of both the developer and other stakeholders to visualise the finished product prior to commencement and thus be able to make viable enhancements where possible.

Currently however, many councils of necessity undertake the statutory minimum consultation on their emerging policies, and are dependent on applicants deciding on, and funding any project-related consultations and engagement themselves (including via pre-application processes and

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<sup>13</sup> RTPI (2019) Delivering Large Scale Housing, Learning from research in the South West of England. Available from: <https://www.rtpi.org.uk/knowledge/practice/delivering-large-scale-housing/>

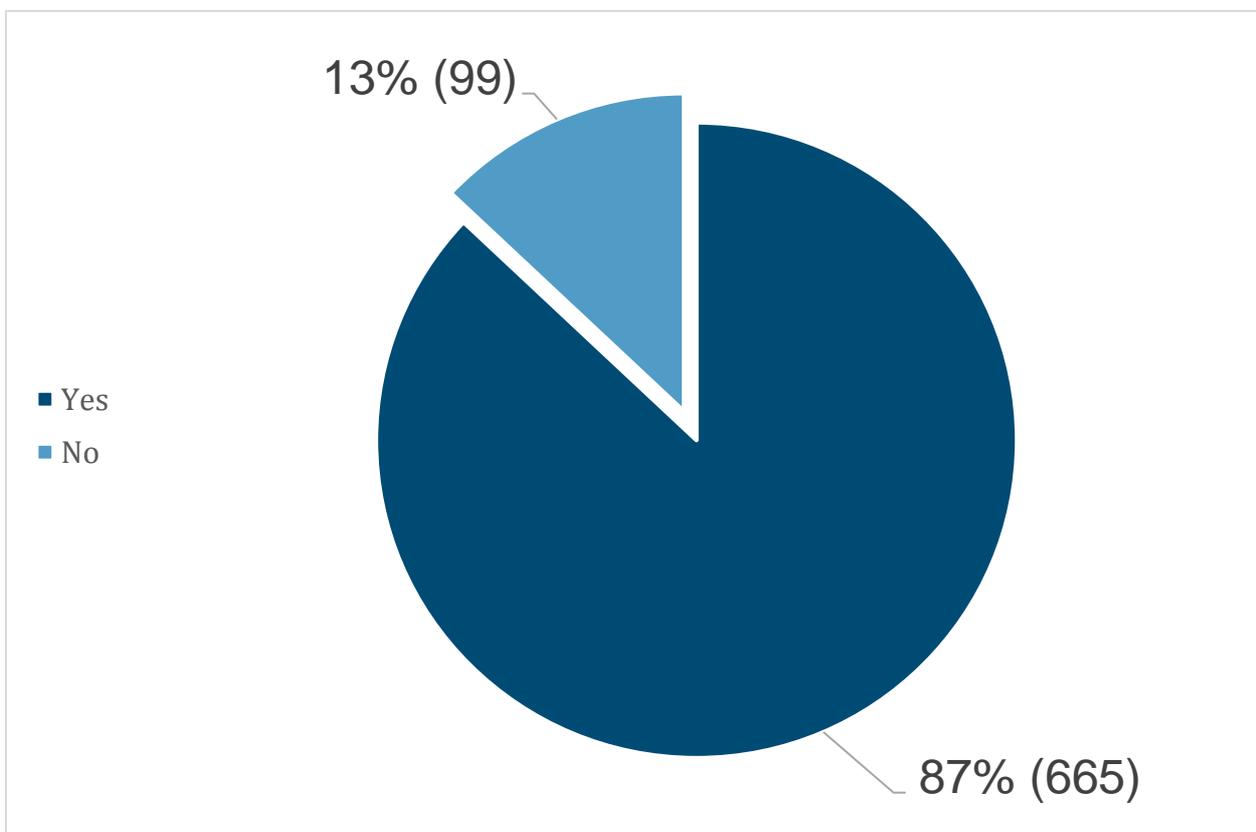
planning performance agreements).

There can also be value in community engagement later in the application process. The Institute is aware of one civic society that has a Planning Forum (that includes both lay people and professionals), that assesses and comments on planning and listed building consent applications. Considering design quality - including the relationship of a proposal with its surroundings - is a fundamental part of that process. Feedback from developers, architects and planners involved in the Forum appears positive and its work is appreciated, opinions not least reflected in how its comments are often cited and expected to be considered in the subsequent determination of applications.

The Institute would therefore suggest that there is scope for planning officers, and more particularly for elected members, to have more training on what is achievable (often more than they know) through the most constructive of early stage and later engagement processes.

Overall, it is the RTPI's view that carefully conceived and well-executed collaborative engagement processes that help to involve communities and stakeholders early in both policy formulation and projects can provide legitimacy to final outcomes. More constructive dialogue through design leads to higher quality policy and project outcomes than community and stakeholder consultation only undertaken on more advanced schemes.

**In your experience, does good design help communities to accept new development?**



## 6. Design methods

There are clear benefits and limitations arising from the 'design methods' that are most commonly used for housing-led projects and in creating communities. It is of course widely acknowledged that having too much design guidance in place can restrict the ability for new and vibrant places to be delivered. However, ill-crafted or no design guidance can lead to poorly designed places.

### Design codes

From the extensive evidence of exemplar projects, one of the 'best ways' for achieving quality design in more major schemes has been to use design codes. In terms of timing, the generality is to require developers to agree a design code following outline permission and before submitting reserved matters approval application(s). On this basis, design codes are most successful if they are evidence-based (as for any other planning policy or guidance), localised, and drafted by urban designers or architects (depending on their content), using clear language. Planning authority area-wide codes asking for new development to simply 'match/respect the local vernacular' are not as effective, although can be appropriate where there are smaller sites likely to be brought forward by SMEs – they can then help speed development through the planning process. As a matter of general principle, it is inappropriate to include examples of 'good' and 'bad' urban design layouts; instead, codes that consider modern designs - and understand the elements of a detailed design that can realistically be influenced by policy in a meaningful way - are more likely to be implementable.

An example of an effective design code's content would be along the following lines:

"The streetscape has a ... quality and therefore we seek a development that responds with ... (e.g. strong vertical components), with ... being the priority, or alternatively, an innovative external design."

Effective design codes are also clear about where a specific material (such as a type of cladding) is not acceptable and why, and should examine evidence of how a material will weather, before it is promoted. Codes should in addition be able to anticipate modern methods of construction, acknowledging that some applicants will submit an application after they have already ordered a modular building and it is in production.

### Masterplanning

Masterplanning is another significant tool but one that can be fraught with issues relating to how such plans are used at outline planning permission stage, and subsequently in relation to the submission of reserved matters and their approval<sup>14</sup>. In short, there are only inadequate available legal mechanisms to provide the practical measures that are needed to help ensure new housing-led developments meet the needs and expectations of communities. The issue in this context is the identification of methods to secure design quality in major housing-led schemes that are granted outline planning permission, with a community (and all-too-often, planning authority)

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<sup>14</sup> RTPI (2019) Delivering Large Scale Housing, Learning from research in the South West of England. Available from: <https://www.rtpi.org.uk/knowledge/practice/delivering-large-scale-housing/>

expectation that the scheme shown on the illustrative masterplan will at least be secured in some way, shape or form. Most authorities do try and condition masterplan parameters when granting planning permission, but subsequently, the terms of the planning permission often actually deliver something quite different (this being less, in design quality terms).

The exception to this observation is generally only where the landowner has a vested interest: there is then a greater commitment to the development of a 'legacy' scheme. It is more usually the case however that in land sales, assumptions are made about the quantum of development to be accommodated on-site. Often that amount is on the limit, or even exceeds what can reasonably be the site's capacity. While the latest PPG on viability (May 2019)<sup>15</sup> makes it clearer than ever that relevant planning policies have to be taken fully into account in site value, it remains the position that in relation to pre-dating transactions, it can be extremely difficult to achieve better design outcomes because of a reluctance by the developer and landowner to reduce the pre-agreed amount of proposed development.

To date, policy responses to masterplan issues relating to the scale of development - and its implementation - have included considering the imposition of ever-more constraining planning conditions. But there is not much of an incentive to follow this course further, given the current focus on the deliverability of planning permissions. Any alternative in the shape of new planning legislation is not realistic in the Institute's view – and also potentially unnecessary – because a prescriptive but inherently flexible/ responsive solution to more enduring masterplans can be found in better-utilising the current application determination process and conditions, and the existing legislation, national policy and practice guidance for s106 obligations.

In conclusion, masterplanning should be a design-led, collaborative process, contributed to by government, local planning authorities and communities. It should not be a stage in development projects that is imposed by developers in line with their own development agreements with landowners; masterplans need debate and co-production to be effective and implementable.

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<sup>15</sup> MHCLG (2019). Viability. Sets out key principles in understanding viability in plan making and decision taking. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/viability>

# 7. Recommendations

Until recently, design quality had slipped off the agenda in the drive for housing delivery. It is unfortunate that quality design in the built environment, in the context at least of the role of planning, has alternately been promoted as a matter of interest to ministers and then relegated in successive administrations. This has meant that a sustained sectoral response has been difficult to achieve, leading to problems with maintaining skills and inconsistency in development industry outputs. Stop-start policies have had their consequences but there is a growing realisation now that unless communities have confidence that the product is good (which translates as, 'I want to live there'), there will be continuing resistance to new residential development – at almost any scale.

## The complexities of perceived low standards of design quality

There is no single cause for perceived low standards of design quality and their unquantified impact on housing delivery; the following paragraphs cite several reasons but do not provide a comprehensive list.

### Housebuilders

There is not yet a general impression that the housebuilding industry, when considered as a whole, is willing to credibly commit to improving design quality on most sites, particularly in more challenging market areas. The view is that standard house types are overwhelmingly adhered to.

**“Despite having a Design Guide in place for a number of years we struggle to get volume housebuilders to deliver anything but standard house types.”** (RTPI design survey 2019 response)

### The NPPF

While design in the context of creating places is given prominence in the NPPF, when considered alongside other considerations (e.g. housing delivery and maintaining a 5-year land supply), it can often be hard for a local planning authority to refuse a scheme only on the grounds of bad design – and even harder to refuse a residential application on grounds of being only of 'average' design. Recognising that recommendations and decisions have to be based on the principles of design quality and must not be subjective, in too many cases the question for planning officers then seems to be 'is it bad enough to refuse?', as opposed to 'is it good enough to approve?'

### Precedent

Officers and members also often have to tackle precedent, where poor quality design has been permitted in the past and their decision making has to remain consistent, despite the perpetuation of poor quality design. They also have to balance competing interests on matters such as housing standards, or conservation. In summary, there is a local authority planner and member-perceived inability to achieve high quality design, with all of these other material considerations and the ever-present threat of planning by appeal. This lack of confidence needs to be addressed urgently.

## **Cost, land values and viability**

More widely, another overall barrier to quality design is often said to be cost; design is frequently the first aspect of a project to see reduced scope, if viability concerns arise – one reason being that it is not yet weighted highly enough in decision making.

Another reality is that quality design tends to occur in higher value areas where there is more development pressure, and where values support bespoke buildings. In lower value/ lower demand areas, the priority of politicians and planners is to encourage development as a matter of principle; design is low in the mix. It is also the case that some councils are understandably reluctant to commit resources to appeals and are concerned that too great a focus on quality will delay schemes and hold back the rate of housing delivery.

It is therefore not only the commerciality of a scheme that constrains design quality - and the extent of council expectations for the scheme to cover, or at least contribute to the wider place making agenda - but also a great many other interrelated factors that are outlined above.

In this environment, there needs to be more encouragement – and failing that, a requirement - for developers to improve design quality.

## **Solutions in the shorter term**

The following suggestions for boosting design quality in the shorter term will only be successful if the Government explicitly supports and progresses all of them as applicable – a multi-faceted initiative is needed.

### **Revise the NPPF**

As the very first step, higher benchmarks in design ought to be recognised by Government as essential for creating places where people want to live, work and spend time – the NPPF is not yet worded strongly enough. As Housing and Planning Minister Kit Malthouse has said<sup>16</sup>, areas where high quality design and good urban design principles have been followed stand the test of time – they are ‘the conservation areas of the future’.

The NPPF and the PPG need to explain how the development industry can embrace innovative design, alongside being very much focused on viability. It should be explained how design quality, if factored in at the outset of a project, does not necessarily add to development cost. At present, design quality is not given the weight it could be because of up-front cost considerations, but this would be different if NPPF policy made it clear that whole-life costs should be considered.

**“Good design pays off in the longer term, both commercially and in terms of public benefits.”** (RTPI design survey 2019 response)

### **Give quality design appropriate weight on appeal**

The consideration of design at appeal is also a current and clearly related concern. It may be a misplaced perception but there is a view that NPPF policy on design is not yet strong enough and consequently, there is at least a perceived lack of support for it from the Planning Inspectorate,

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<sup>16</sup> Hansard (2018) Beauty and the built environment. <https://bit.ly/2YP3mZJ>

when schemes have been refused on design grounds and decisions are being defended on appeal. One RTPI design survey respondent has reported how their own planning department:

'[...] might have greater confidence in securing better design quality outcomes if it was clearer that the Planning Inspectorate were doing the same. I'm sure they are, it just needs to be more widely known.'

There is an RTPI member view that the NPPF's 'tilted balance', as well as appeal decisions generally, tend to perpetuate standard housing estate design across the country. Following a successful appeal, the conditions attached to the decision letter can limit the ability of planners to negotiate on detailed design matters (such as window reveals, material quality, brick or stone detailing) - matters which often make a difference to overall quality.

The NPPF therefore needs to be more explicit about the degree of priority being given to local planning authorities having a 5-year housing land supply, which currently is seemingly the priority that is at the expense of everything else, including design quality. Poor design quality should be stated in no uncertain terms as sufficient grounds for appeal dismissal.

### **Boost the role of Homes England in promoting quality design**

Homes England could have a hugely positive role to play in promoting quality design in residential-led developments. Their current focus is on practical implementation and housing delivery; in time, this could develop to also include paying full attention to quality design. For example, the public body should be creating guidance and examples of best practice for design codes etc. for the new generation of urban extensions and new settlements coming forward, particularly in the wider south east.

### **Revoke existing permitted development rights for changes of use to residential (and do not introduce proposed rights for upward extensions, or offices to residential rebuilds)**

While poorly considered planning permissions can create precedents for further low quality development, a very significant problem is created by the current permitted development rights for changes of use to residential – particularly for offices changing to new homes (but also high street uses changing to residential). The RTPI has written extensively on the deficiencies of these rights and how they can create poor living conditions; the January 2019 RTPI response to the MHCLG consultation, 'Planning reform: supporting the high street and increasing the delivery of new homes'<sup>17</sup> is the Institute's most comprehensive and recent summary of the issues relating to there being no space standards, nor affordable housing or related infrastructure contributions (amongst many other unacceptable aspects).

Without these existing change of use rights being abolished – and the proposed rights for upward extensions and for office to residential rebuilds no longer being pursued by Government – there is an inherent contradiction in ministers or the Commission promoting design quality as a development principle.

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<sup>17</sup> RTPI (2019) RTPI response to the MHCLG consultation, 'Planning reform: supporting the high street and increasing the delivery of new homes. <https://bit.ly/30zdk33>

## **Add to planners' design expertise, increase councillors' design training, and boost council resourcing**

Commentators have often referred to a perceived lack of design skills in the planning sector. This is an issue which requires some careful analysis. As a result of deep, post-recession cuts and reduced resources, there has been a hollowing-out of design capability and understanding within local government, in parallel with the national changes highlighted in response to question 2 above.

There is an urgent need in the short term to address this lack of design expertise in local planning authorities - and in private planning practices - particularly when it comes to design details. This is based on a perception that is only in part justified, that 'planners' do not have design skills, or knowledge. Developers tend to regard their planning consultants as project managers for putting together submissions, rather than as professionals with important design inputs to be made. It is acknowledged however that there is a general misunderstanding in planning of the differences between style and design and the impact of detail; far too many post-permission changes are accepted as non-material or material amendments that in fact have a detrimental impact on design quality, as they are not properly understood on application. Less justified is a perception that planners do not understand architectural design and the costs involved in making scheme changes.

Therefore wherever planning professionals do have design skills, they should be recognised as playing an important role; developers should be encouraged to be willing and receptive to understanding that local authority and consultancy planners and urban designers can add value with their comments.

For councils, this issue is part of the much wider problem of under-resourcing. As explained in the RTPI submission to the 2019 Public Accounts Committee inquiry on planning and the broken housing market<sup>18</sup>, the Institute's research on investing in delivery<sup>19</sup> led by Arup (2015 and 2018) found major reductions in planning staff, as well as evidence of other issues associated with Government cuts. Put simply, local authority budget cuts are impacting on design quality. One respondent to the RTPI survey commented how they are now, 'the only urban designer in a major size unitary LPA; until Government cuts there were 3 of us'.

This situation only adds to the overall issue of inadequate officer resourcing, summarised by a survey respondent as leading to a lack of officer time at pre-planning and in application determination, and at enforcement stage too.

Coupled with building regulations impacting on what can be achievable in design terms, and the ever-growing complexities of the planning regime that have been observed as creating a 'tick box' culture – particularly its development management processes – there is a perception that the creative aspects of the planning profession have been undermined. In response to the RTPI design survey, one member explained how instead, they 'would like to have more of a role in shaping how the design of a development can enhance its socio-economic performance e.g.

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<sup>18</sup> RTPI (2019) response to Public Accounts Committee inquiry on planning and the broken housing market <https://www.rtpi.org.uk/knowledge/consultations/2019-responses/rtpi-response-to-public-accounts-committee-inquiry-on-planning-and-the-broken-housing-market/>

<sup>19</sup> RTPI (2018). Investing in Delivery <https://www.rtpi.org.uk/investingindelivery>

pedestrian and cycle-focused design to enhance public health and social interaction’.

To help address these issues in the short term, Public Practice<sup>20</sup> could be encouraged to continue to grow the number of associates already being placed in hosting authorities across London and the south east. Once resource deficiencies have been made up in financial terms – the RTPI supports a further application fee increase, at least in principle, to this end – dedicated, in-house urban designer posts should be created and secured. Ideally, experienced conservation specialists should be appointed in-house too, to further promote the debate of design merits.

**“No code or tool is a substitute for somebody who knows what they are doing and is able to exercise professional judgment”.** (RTPI design survey 2019 response)

All of these more recently appointed, qualified officers would be a most important resource; they would be the first port of call for consultation on pre-application schemes, with their initial thoughts being likely to be invaluable in planning officers’ assessments of emerging projects. To provide continuity, they could then advise and comment on reserved matters and full, major applications (and smaller, more complex schemes); additional resources should also be allocated to ensure that development management officers are able to properly consider and assimilate others’ advice, using it to encourage scheme revisions where necessary to improve design.

Alongside boosting planners’ design skills in the public sector and consultancy, councillor training on good design should be far more prevalent and undertaken as a matter of course a short time after election and appointment to any committee charged with determining applications. Building for Life 12 (see below) can be a useful training tool in this context, as well as helping in reviewing developments post-completion. This final review would help members – and other stakeholders – to learn what has worked well and what has not, and respond accordingly (via policy revisions and/or taking different approaches to decision making).

### **Promote quality design-led highways’ policies and standards**

Beyond planning departments and council committees, many schemes are highways-led, with rigidly-applied standards tending to mean that proposed developments are first and foremost designed for the car. There is an RTPI member perception that there is, ‘[...] little or no willingness to ensure good quality design in local authority highway departments and also from the Department for Transport’. Housing-led development proposals that are considered to meet local highways’ standards and requirements can prioritise elements contrary to quality design; twisting and curved roads for example lead to dead space which is a maintenance cost, limit permeability and harm the long term vitality of a neighbourhood.

The Department for Transport (and Highways England) should be much more focused on design quality, rather than improving the situation for cars. Additional Government and planning fee income resources should be used to focus on local highways’ departments, to ensure officers have integrated training and an understanding of good design, leading to a move away from a car-led design approach to one that prioritises pedestrians and cyclists, and one that is landscape-led.

Local highway authorities can implement schemes without needing planning permission; this right could have the potential to bring about ‘the biggest uplift in design quality’, according to one RTPI

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<sup>20</sup> Public Practice website. <http://www.publicpractice.org.uk/>

design survey response.

A combined effort is needed to ensure that design in planning and highways interrelates and that highway standards do not trump wider, good design principles.

### **Use quality design as the basis for planning policies and local guidance**

Quality design should be a key factor in formulating and implementing planning policies, given that it can help to: improve health; create more environmentally sustainable places; attract investment; and support civic pride – all are key factors in place shaping. Local planning authorities should therefore ensure that their development plans include council area-specific design, and design-related, policies (both in local plans and neighbourhood plans).

Design-based statutory plan policies should then be used to prepare – and developers' attention should be drawn to – more detailed supplementary planning documents (SPDs). These can take hugely varied forms, depending on local circumstances and include: village design statements; AONB management plans; character assessments; residential design guides; and village design statements. Such SPDs generally should set out good design, area-specific approaches to development and provide some minimum guidelines for privacy, private outdoor space, sunlight etc. Their guidelines can be revised more easily and quickly than development plan policy, if it is found that they ought to be superseded because principles underlying good design have advanced.

In one local planning authority, by way of example from the RTPPI survey responses, an adopted Design Guide covers all aspects of design, consisting of 10 separate supplements on different topic areas. These are set in the context of policy requirements for development briefs and design codes for strategic scale developments, for all sites over 300 dwellings, and for smaller qualifying sites that meet specific criteria such as being located in areas of sensitivity, having multiple landowners etc.

Good practice guidance from both inside and outside England can be relevant when drafting plan policies and new guidance; for example for care home proposals, one English authority works to Stirling University's Good Practice in Design for Dementia and Sight Loss<sup>21</sup> and its most recently completed scheme was awarded a gold standard in terms of best practice in dementia care accommodation design. Likewise in Glasgow, there is an overarching place making policy that is supported by the Scottish Place Standard<sup>22</sup>; strategic development frameworks are now being prepared elsewhere on a similar basis. The RTPPI's own 2017 practice advice on dementia and planning<sup>23</sup> is also applicable; it is being updated this year too.

### **Create local area design guides**

There are multiple examples of local planning authorities producing and using design guides successfully – they may or may not refer to sustainability, and may cover e.g. 'urban living', housing, or simply 'design'. Examples cited in the recent RTPPI member survey include:

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<sup>21</sup> The Dementia Centre. <https://dementia.stir.ac.uk/design/good-practice-design-dementia-and-sight-loss>

<sup>22</sup> Place Standard. How good is our place? <https://www.placestandard.scot/>

<sup>23</sup> RTPPI Dementia and Town Planning. <https://www.rtpi.org.uk/knowledge/practice/dementia-and-town-planning/>

- South Northamptonshire Council, where the planning department has carried out its own assessments of what is 'locally distinctive' and produced its own comprehensive Design Guide<sup>24</sup>.
- Another authority's SPD design guide that covers a range of issues relating to local distinctiveness/ character and residential amenity.
- Manchester City, where schemes are assessed against the Manchester Residential Quality Guidance<sup>25</sup> (2017); guidance in relation to character areas, and conservation areas and historical analysis, also assists with allowing new buildings to complement heritage.
- Reference being made in one authority to the Yorkshire Dales National Park Design Guide<sup>26</sup> (2015) that is included in a local plan policy and is constantly used to assess design quality in the National Park.
- Another local authority that already has a conservation and design team in place is putting together 'design quality indicators', to assess developments. Due to resources, this will be restricted to larger schemes but the intention is that the indicators could actually be used to assess a range of different development types and scales.
- In another local authority area, design is one of the most important considerations, with much emphasis placed on the Council's Design Guide. But despite having a Design Guide in place for a number of years, the respondent here also highlighted how it can still be, 'a struggle to get volume housebuilders to deliver anything but standard house types', while also recognising how they 'drive efficiencies to keep house prices down'.

### **Promote quality design in planning applications and decision taking**

Whenever design quality is identified as a key issue, national guidance should encourage high levels of 'end-to-end' engagement from developer teams and local planning authorities alike, from pre-application discussion and negotiations on e.g. parameters, through to discharge of conditions, including liaison with design officers, and/ or panel design review of projects (see further detail below).

At pre-application stage, council and developer team planners should be encouraged by the awaited PPG on well-designed places to work closely with the scheme architect, to ensure a full site appraisal is carried out on every project and an explanation is provided as to how this has informed the submitted scheme – both should be described in the planning application design and access statement (DAS). This suggestion is made in the wider context of a view that the role of DAS has been generally 'dumbed down' over the years, as the Government's above-referred-to focus on housing numbers has left matters of quality behind. DAS can now tend to be given to the architect and/ or planning consultants on a project to write in a matter of days, prior to application submission. They can also tend to contain very limited information about either 'the bigger picture' or the detail, e.g. of how 'places' will be constructed and the quality of materials to be used. They then become generic documents about site context and justification, and not about design quality. As such and as a generality, they can be less innovative or exciting; their role in the development

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.southnorthants.gov.uk/info/145/supplementary-planning-guidance-and-documents/245/design-guide> <https://bit.ly/2YNEDVD>

<sup>25</sup> Deloitte Real Estate on behalf of Manchester City Council (2017). Manchester Residential Quality Guidance

<sup>26</sup> Yorkshire Dales National Park Design Guide (<https://bit.ly/2VGVdUT>)

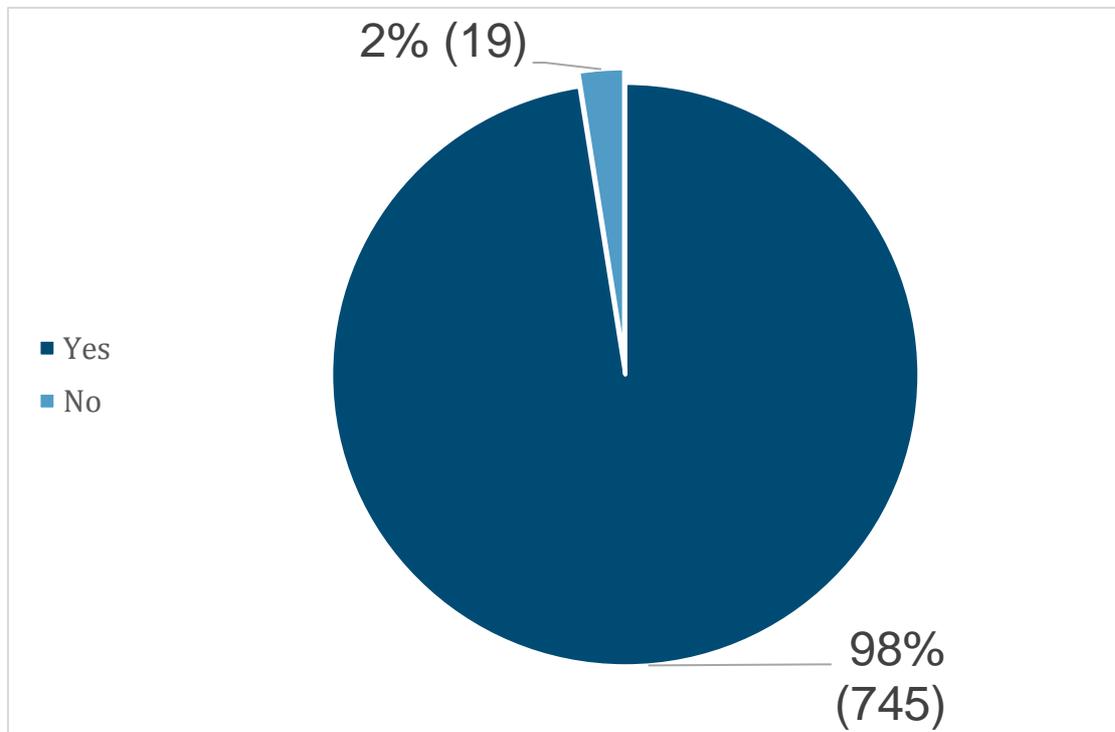
management process can be limited and needs to be reviewed, and their former usefulness when first conceived reinstated.

One suggested DAS approach suggested in the RTPI design survey responses would be - potentially via the PPG - to ask applicants to establish a design narrative from aspects of the local landscape and cultural heritage that they are then responding to in the design of their buildings and landscape. This would provide an objective framework against which planning officers could review character, and ensure the approaches to massing, articulation, materials and detailing are consistent with the narrative.

Consideration should also be given to guidance for applicants being to combine townscape and landscape assessments (and increasingly, water management should be added into design codes and parameter plans). Landscape assessment should as a matter of course be at a more local level than that available at national and district authority scales.

In decision-taking, planning officers and other decision takers should be looking at how the proposal fits its locality and local character – relevant material considerations would include: scale; height; building line; respect for neighbours; tree protection; daylight and sunlight reaching adjoining sites and buildings; protected/ created views; vehicular access points; and materials (preferably with them being conditioned at permission stage, not left for submission via the discharge of conditions). Details can be hugely beneficial to the overall appearance of completed developments; national guidance should explain how prescriptive advice from officers and related planning conditions can be beneficial to developers in this regard.

**Will improving design quality create better outcomes for place making and for communities?**



## Design review

The role of independent, local or regional design review panels - particularly but not solely for major schemes - can be critical to ensuring that design quality is considered in terms of built form, accessibility and landscape. Likewise, design review can also assist with the recognition of landmark design, which might otherwise be 'trumped by matters of principle' – as one survey respondent put it - as a consequence of inflexible policy and guidance.

But it has to be recognised that there can be a cost involved that may render this stage unaffordable for some projects. Another form of less formal design review may then be helpful before/ during pre-application stage, where a developer's team/ their architect involves a consultant/ another architect to be 'a critical friend'. Peer review is another possibility.

Whether internal or external, or if for smaller schemes in the form of design surgeries held together with officers from other departments – design review can also be particularly effective when combined with comments from an accessibility forum.

The timing of design review is key; panel advice should not be sought too late in the day i.e. when the scheme's design is largely finalised and ready to be submitted for planning, and when there is only limited scope to make improvements beyond relatively minor tweaks.

In conclusion, the awaited PPG on well-designed places should elaborate on the extensive and versatile roles that design review can play in enhancing quality, by the timely assessment of schemes of all different scales and types.

## Use available tools to help achieve design quality

There is already a vast resource of published material available for assisting the development sector in ensuring design quality in the built environment; the difficulty is that it is not all accessible on a single web site. As a consequence, not all of the sources are used and applied consistently.

While much of the guidance and advice available may have been prepared some time ago, this does not mean at all that it is outdated – the converse is often true. Some local planning authority officers responding to the Institute's design survey are strong advocates, or make extensive use in assessing major applications, of Building for Life 12<sup>27</sup> (Design Council, 2015)<sup>28</sup> – despite other planners being of the view that it does not necessarily of itself create well-designed places. There is a concern that some housebuilders rate their own developments with 12 'greens', despite a scheme's clear and obvious issues.

And there are numerous Historic England design guides and CABI publications that are as relevant today as when published. The Urban Design Compendium<sup>29</sup> (Homes and Communities Agency, 2000) and Manual for Streets<sup>30</sup> (2000) are still potentially invaluable resources, as are many RIBA<sup>31</sup> and BRE Group past publications<sup>32</sup>. More specialised guidance is also available,

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<sup>27</sup> Building for Life. Built for life. <http://www.builtforlifehomes.org/>

<sup>28</sup> Design Council, Building for Life 12. <https://bit.ly/2F0epqg>

<sup>29</sup> Homes and Communities Agency (2000). Urban Design Compendium <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/urban-design-compendium>

<sup>30</sup> MHCLG and DfT (2007). 'Manual for Streets', Designing and modifying residential streets. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/manual-for-streets>

<sup>31</sup> RIBA Publishing. <https://www.architecture.com/riba-publishing>

such as HAPPI<sup>33</sup> (Housing our Ageing Population Panel for Innovation) and Chartered Institute of Building codes of practice<sup>34</sup>. But next to none are tools that are frequently, or consistently, applied. Their limited scope as individual publications also means that used in isolation, they do not necessarily create a well-designed place.

There are also very up-to-date tools that should increasingly be brought into everyday use in pre-application and planning application determination processes; these tools include Vu.City, and Photoshop that can help make alterations to improve layout and elevations.

More simply, the use of 3D models of designs should be promoted, to test their quality prior to planning submission stage.

Rather than using technological tools or design codes however, there could be clear encouragement in the forthcoming PPG to adhere to simple architectural principles as they are more likely to achieve design quality – these include symmetry, active frontages, avoiding blank facades, window hierarchies, equal casements, rhythm and interest, and above all, quality materials. This approach could provide the consistent approach to design quality that is needed across England, being a loose framework of design principles that each local planning authority can then adapt to its own local character and setting.

### **Post-occupancy evaluation**

Not only should management and maintenance arrangements for common parts and public realm/green infrastructure be considered early in any emerging project, there should be sufficient planning authority resources available to undertake post-occupancy evaluation (similar to DCLG's Code for Sustainable Homes<sup>35</sup> that was withdrawn by Government in March 2015<sup>36</sup>, or that is still part of BREEAM<sup>37</sup>); post-occupancy Building for Life-type assessments are perceived in response to the design survey as inadequate by comparison.

Post-permission checklists can however be satisfactory, if based on Building for Life criteria and local plan design policy criteria, with the combination being used to assess a scheme against opportunities, constraints and client objectives. This also enables statutory design policies to be monitored e.g. annually in terms of how they are improving design.

Planning professionals should in any event visit good schemes post-occupation; likewise, there should be annual scheme reviews for members of planning committees. For example, one RTPI member's authority conducts annual 'Quality Counts' tours that include architects, planners, councillors, amenity societies and members of the public. Observations are used to inform policy making (a new residential design guide was recently adopted) and decision taking.

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<sup>32</sup> Bre Publications and News. <https://www.bregroup.com/certifiedthermalproducts/page.jsp?id=3060>

<sup>33</sup> Housing our Ageing Population Panel for Innovation (HAPPI)  
<https://www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/browse/Design-building/HAPPI/>

<sup>34</sup> The CIOB Codes of Practice. <https://www.ciob.org/ciob-codes-practice>

<sup>35</sup> Communities and Local Government (2008). The Code for Sustainable Homes, Setting the standard in sustainability for new homes. <https://bit.ly/2VGRpDo>

<sup>36</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government and The Rt Hon Lord Pickles (2015)  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/planning-update-march-2015>

<sup>37</sup> BREEAM. <https://www.breeam.com/>

## Fostering higher standards in design over the long term

Over the longer term, Government, local authorities, stakeholders and the entire development sector together need to actively promote what ‘good’ looks like, in relation to ‘higher standards in design’. There are two key suggestions relevant here, for implementation over the longer term:

### **Outline applications and permissions**

While some planning authorities do try to bring higher quality design into their areas, this may continue to be difficult in the longer term in relation to outline planning applications and permissions for residential development - and housebuilders being able to argue that their existing offers sell well. One possible longer term remedy for this situation could be a new requirement (for full applications and reserved matters) for a specific ‘Housing Design Quality Statement’. This would be a bespoke document for each housing site, focusing on the design of the individual dwellings proposed, their construction and materials, and the ‘place’ that they create. The emphasis would be on innovation and creating exciting new homes.

### **Planning and architecture education**

More fundamentally and from the start of higher education, architecture and planning could explore joint ways that the education system for both professions could develop opportunities for shared teaching, particularly in early years, so as to ensure that each has a clearer understanding of the other. For example, the teaching of urban design principles and practice on both architecture and planning courses could be strengthened, to increase an appreciation of context and sustainable development.

Learning from existing good practice, such an approach to planning and architecture education could assist in fostering both professions’ confidence, particularly once in the workplace and when listening to, and supporting community aspirations, and when part of multi- and cross-disciplinary teams working on larger developments. These teams invariably include chartered town planners as the key delivery agent, working alongside high quality architects and landscape designers on ensuring implementability. Planners and architects that can bring a collaborative approach should be better equipped to help ensure the best comprehensive design is achieved, incorporating open spaces, highways, sustainable drainage systems and green infrastructure. A multi-disciplinary team approach to place making – with a greater focus on the role and benefits of spatial planning - should be considered as one of the principal routes to achieving quality design in the built environment.

Place making, through planning and masterplanning, should also continue to be seen as core components of both professions’ Continuing Professional Development.





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