

 greatplaces
HOUSING GROUP

making places

The Quality Design Guide

Foreword

Growth by means of development of new houses is a priority for Great Places and with this commitment comes a responsibility to ensure that our new developments have a positive impact on the neighbourhoods where we work.

Too many housing schemes lack character or 'quality' and those responsible for new housing development shouldn't just fit buildings on a site in the most efficient manner but try to create places where people will enjoy living.

The purpose of this Quality Design Guide is firstly to ensure our architects, consultants and contractors understand their duty to create schemes which are a pleasure to live in, contribute to the local community and look beautiful.

Secondly, the Guide intends to provide some practical advice for the design team to help them tease out and discuss the proposals in a structured way. It will assist in the formulation of a design brief reflecting for each development Great Places' requirements for quality, sustainability, durability, security, customer satisfaction and value for money.

This guide has been written from both an academic urban design/architectural perspective, and from a more practical viewpoint drawing on the real experiences of our customers and Great Places staff managing our schemes on a day to day basis.

If you consider the most successful housing schemes, they combine the utilitarian requirements of documents such as the building regulations, space standards, etc., with a vision for something less quantifiable which makes the building special.

The intention of this guide is to help designers to combine the less quantifiable with the utilitarian to create functional, and easy to maintain buildings which are also beautiful and enrich the lives of the residents in the neighbourhood in which they are built.



Matt Harrison

Matt Harrison
Chief executive

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Introduction

Developing a shared vision

Housing design is a complex process involving many participants. A good outcome is much more likely when there is a 'shared vision' that is understood and supported by the whole team from the outset. This is why we encourage the use of the Great Places Project Journal which helps the design team to set a brief agreed by all parties hopefully avoiding wasted design time. We also use the 'ProJo' to record any lessons learned from a project as we recognise that this learning from previous schemes improves our design and specifications.

Designing for low management and maintenance

Designing for low management and maintenance should be an integral part of the design process but it can be overlooked or outweighed by other short term pressures. Part of the solution lies in keeping things simple – Services should be routed efficiently, pipework and stopcocks should be accessible. Plant and equipment should be easy to reach and maintain and properly managed. Another important facet is the quality and durability of the external fabric. The last few years has seen brick re-emerge as the cladding of choice. This is a welcome trend because good bricks have an almost indefinite life and require little maintenance. Timber and render became popular in the 1990s, these and other lightweight cladding materials have their place but should be used with care, and generally in moderation. Many, otherwise good-looking buildings, are ruined by money saving shortcuts (often referred to as 'value engineering'). Lifecycle costing is a complex topic based on the principle that long-term value is more important than initial cost. As landlords, Great Places understand this well particularly as we build for people on lower incomes. Residents often share the eventual burden of higher maintenance costs through service charges. Measures

such as ensuring that windows can be safely cleaned by residents from inside the building, or optimising the number of households that share a lift can make a big difference to running costs and ultimately a residents budget.

Environmental considerations

The question of environmental sustainability in construction is a vast subject which isn't covered in this document but it involves many aspects including material selection, embodied energy, waste, water usage etc. Conservation of energy is covered by Building regulations but is silent on other environmental issues. Because of this our Employers Requirements document stipulates our own required minimum standards. As best practice a designer should always consider sustainability at the earliest stage in a project as decisions made at this point could mean that the scheme cannot reach guaranteed standards later on.

Daylight and Sunlight

The quality and amount of daylight entering a room can dramatically affect the experience of people living there. With the end of the code for sustainable homes there is now no longer a requirement for designers to consider daylighting but we still see it as an essential part of a quality housing design. Many things affect the quality of daylighting and the designer should consider the following:

- The orientation of the house and windows
- The proximity of other buildings and structures
- The height of ceilings and windows
- The depth of rooms
- Windows on more than one wall
- 'Through rooms' with windows on both sides.
- Wall and floor finishes and colours
- The function of the room itself (ie kitchen).

Daylighting is also linked with the growing problem of overheating and designers should always consider the two subjects at the same time.

Ventilation, air quality and overheating

New homes are much more airtight and without careful design this can compromise ventilation and lead to overheating.

Natural, easy to operate, ventilation is always preferable to mechanical as it has no associated energy bills. The most effective form of natural ventilation is cross ventilation where openings are provided on opposite elevations allowing large volumes of air to pass through the home. The least effective is single sided ventilation such as in single aspect apartments.

To reduce the risk of overheating the following points should be considered during the design stage:

- Provide safe to use night time ventilation through opening windows
- Plant deciduous trees in front of south facing windows for summer shading without losing winter warmth and light
- Provide Brise Soleil or closable shutters to reduce solar gain to south facing windows.
- Finally where natural ventilation is not adequate consider MVHR.

Energy Efficiency - Affordable warmth

Heating bills can be one of the highest costs for people on lower incomes and Great Places are committed to ensuring that we provide houses that are affordable to heat. This subject is covered in more detail in our Employers Requirements document but it is important to recognise that the initial designs can have a significant effect on the eventual energy performance of a dwelling. Orientation of houses in relation to the sun, irregular plan forms, balconies or projections are all design led decisions which will affect energy efficiency. A well-insulated building fabric should always be the first step to lowering heating bills while also reducing carbon emissions. Low carbon technologies or renewables such as solar thermal or MVHR can contribute towards heating, hot

water and/or electrical loads in the home however they require ongoing maintenance which can cost more than the actual savings realised.

Soundproofing

Poor soundproofing between neighbours and other sources of noise can have a very negative impact on the health and wellbeing of residents. The levels of acoustic insulation required to meet Building Regulations Part E were last updated many years ago and are considered inadequate. Our Employers Requirements require improved sound insulation beyond building regulations standards as we see this as a cost effective measure resulting in fewer resident complaints.

In addition to material specifications the layout of dwellings and in particular rear gardens needs to be considered at design stage well before a building regulation application is made.

Creating places – Place-Making

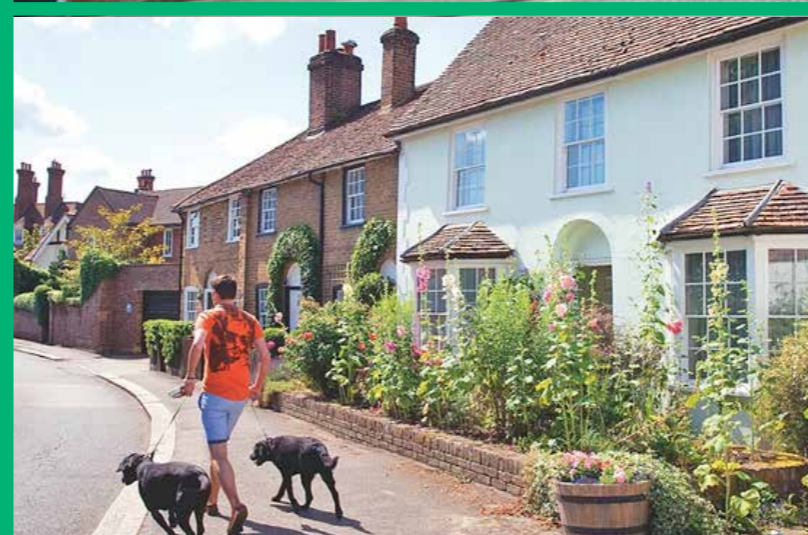
Beyond the primary purpose of providing homes for people, residential design is about creating places. The quality of our external environment is integral to our sense of wellbeing and belonging. Places that are well designed become well loved and well used. They provide a framework for building stable and sustainable communities.

For designers it may be difficult to accept that the spaces between the buildings they design are more important than the buildings themselves but this is where interaction between members of a community can happen.

Placemaking considers masterplanning and neighbourhood strategies, and looks at all aspects of the external environment and public realm. Reference should be made to the national planning policy and guidance, particularly the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and to other published good practice guidance such as Building for Life 12, the Urban Design Compendium and many others.

New developments should create spaces that respond to context based on an understanding of the neighbourhood and existing assets. It should contribute to the neighbourhood with a safe network of connected and legible spaces and routes suitable for pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles. Public space is a valuable asset to a community and most successful when it is clear what its purpose is and it is well managed. Crucially there should always be a clear distinction between public space and what is private.

Successful place making requires early consideration. Well before pen is put to paper, there should be discussion and reflection on what we want the place to be and how it fits in with the neighbourhood. Looking at best practice examples is always a good starting point but every area has its own unique character and what works in one scheme may not work elsewhere.



Understanding context

Context is about understanding the nature of a development in relation to its neighbourhood. Housing developments should respond to the local context to create a character that is specific to the place. The design should respond to existing development patterns, being sensitive to its site and the surrounding area and integrate in a sensitive way. When done successfully a scheme has a sense of 'belonging' to the area rather than looking like it could be anywhere in the country.



- Reinforce the local community – Avoid creating something that is too different or that 'turns its back' on the neighbourhood
- Creating Places of Distinction – drawing from local context strengthens the identity of the whole neighbourhood
- Work with the contours of the land
- Using existing site assets – views, slopes, trees, etc are all local assets to be exploited
- Integration with surroundings – using the right materials, forms and landscape elements for the locality
- Consider connectivity to existing access roads and footpaths.

The biggest challenge regarding context is deciding whether a development should follow the design

characteristics of the surrounding area or to deliberately contrast without trying to replicate what is around it. Either approach is valid but should be determined by the quality of the area. For example a Conservation Area will already have a strong context in which to work where it would be difficult to justify a departure from the local vernacular.



In other mixed quality areas a new aesthetic may be required and attempting to integrate could reinforce an already unsatisfactory development pattern. Sometimes a new aesthetic can revive confidence in the existing community. But constantly be wary of



the idea that different or new is not always better, also that the existing residents won't want their homes to be regarded as somehow second-rate.

Understanding character

Our towns and cities were developed over centuries mostly without any planning or urban design rules, following localised traditions of building form and layout. With the development of planning laws and other building codes in the last century many of these examples of best practice were examined and formalised into a school of thought. It is important to analyse the surrounding area in which new developments sit. There is little point in spending too much time providing an in depth analysis of an obviously poor quality townscape but on the other hand there can be a lot to learn from better quality areas.



Consider the following:

- Layout of streets and spaces – traditional grid form, cul de sacs, street trees, boundaries and on street parking, hierarchy, are some streets more important than others?
- Urban block sizes and shapes – how big are the urban blocks, do they block access through the neighbourhood?
- Relationship of buildings to streets - are they set back from the street or against the pavement? Is there a consistent height or do they vary?
- Types of streets and footpaths
- Uses of surrounding buildings
- Local materials and construction details

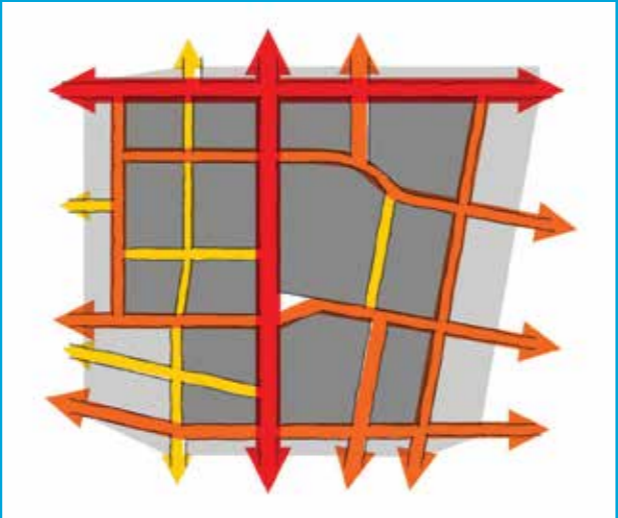


Connecting with the neighbourhood

Generally people like to feel involved in their community and no new residential development should ignore its neighbours. The more physical connections they have with their neighbours the stronger the community will become. The best models of housing development look beyond the 'red line' of the site. People interact with their neighbourhood – Shops, schools, friends houses, sports grounds, places of worship etc. A well used route is a safer route. These routes are there because they go somewhere people want to go.

- Existing routes across a site for example should be respected and enhanced, not closed off.
- New routes should be designed to encourage as much use as possible and safely cater for pedestrians, cyclists and cars.
- Respecting local footpaths, historical routes and maintaining links to the existing community is critical and should not be ignored.
- Where routes need to be redesigned relocated or even closed ensure good community connections are retained.
- Create connections that are attractive, well lit and overlooked and safe
- Ensure routes pass in front of houses not behind.

Although living beside each other these neighbours would have to walk almost half a mile to visit each other



Try to create a hierarchy of routes



Examples of safe and well overlooked routes through a neighbourhood



A badly overlooked footpath will be less used and more dangerous

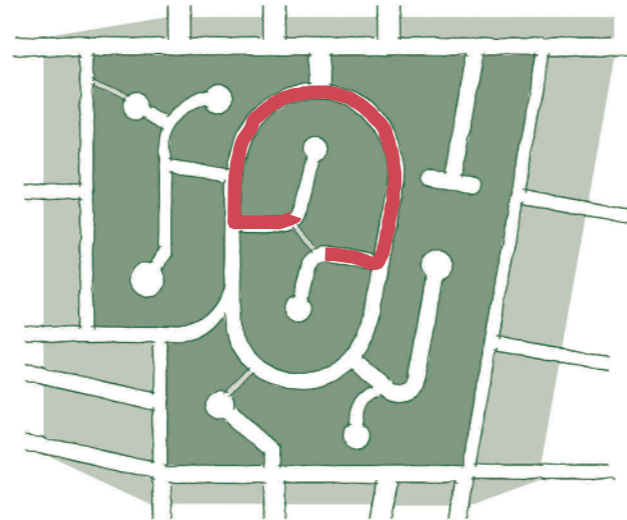
Street layouts

A well considered layout of streets and buildings is the most important factor in the success of a new development. If this is wrong then even the best quality architecture will not make a 'Great Place'. Although the buildings it serves may have been replaced several times a new road is a major piece of infrastructure that could endure for hundreds of years. There are road layouts in Britain dating back to medieval times. If a road is in the wrong position it can be a mistake that lasts for centuries so it's worth spending time making sure the layout works.

- The layout should ensure that the site is legible, is easily to navigate
- Provide visual clues or markers within the development to allow people to orientate themselves around the site
- Create streets defined by buildings
- Design buildings that turn corners well
- Use a pattern of road types to create a hierarchy
- Make the most of views eg. at the end of a street or of distant landmarks
- Ensure that there are no dead ends or cul-de sacs within the development
- Think how easy it is to make a mental map of the area.

Legibility and permeability

It is good practice to design a housing layout with perimeter blocks to ensure that the streets are fronted with entrances to the front and private spaces and gardens to the rear facing other back gardens. This ensures that street layouts are easy to understand and well connected. Experimental layouts such as the Radburn tried to separate the car from the pedestrian however the layouts created confusion between fronts and backs, open spaces with no function, and a confusing network of routes.



While the cul-de-sac (above) can create quiet attractive environments, they bring other problems such as creating very long walks for pedestrians almost forcing the use of the car to get about, increasing traffic and parking problems. A series of cul-de-sacs are often served by a distributor road which properties turn their back on, again creating an unfriendly and potentially unsafe street for pedestrians. Sometimes site conditions dictate that a cul-de-sac is the only option but they should not be our first option.



Landmarks

An area is easier to understand if the road layout is associated to certain landmarks. A church spire at the end of a new road is better than one hidden behind a new building, or taller buildings on prominent corners works better than a single storey building. Anything that makes one street distinctive from another will break the monotony and help visitors to find their way around.



The church spire acts as a way finder in the area



Many recent housing schemes have created a series of streets that all look the same, where the houses are the same, the same distances apart, roads are all the same width constructed using similar materials. Its easy to get lost in such an area as there are no landmarks or other clues to tell you where you are. Well designed areas have streets with character that reflect a clear structure. The street is a place in its own right. The busiest streets should be treated in a different way to more private streets – if it serves 5 or 6 houses does it really need a footpath on both sides? Buildings can be positioned to create 'pinch points' in a road layout which will create gateways and slow traffic.

- Make the most of existing local landmarks
- Create streets of different character by varying materials and widths
- Use trees and taller buildings to create interest
- Use taller buildings at important gateways or corners



Streets for all

Streets are the heart of a residential area and should be designed in a way that allows them to function as social spaces that support low vehicle speeds, pedestrians and cyclists and even play. Streets need to be for everyone not just the car user. They are valuable civic spaces and shouldn't be designed as 'car corridors' just to satisfy the highways officer's requirements regarding flow of traffic, maintenance and parking.

We have built several schemes incorporating shared surfaces or 'Home Zones' and these have been very successful in creating an environment which is much more friendly to all residents with slower traffic speeds.

Most highways officers classify roads based on design speeds, widths and the number of units it serves, but

this doesn't consider the character of the street that is created. Most importantly it can reduce the quality of the enclosure on the street.

- Ensure open spaces between buildings have a function
- Streets should connect to other streets providing a series of direct routes between places.
- Always ensure that houses front on to the street. Never have a back gardens fronting on to a road.
- Design streets as social places
- Use best quality hard landscape materials when possible
- Provide good natural surveillance
- Avoid speed limit enforcement through excessive signage

Creating spaces - enclosure

The need for enclosure is a primary human instinct. By being aware of the association between the heights and distances between buildings, designers have an opportunity to respond to these same needs.

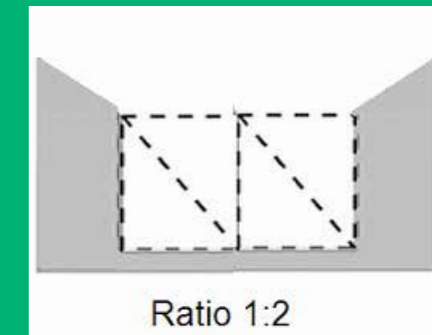
Buildings define the spaces around them. After dealing with all the many 'compliance' measures that the designer is obliged to fulfil there is a tendency to finish up with space 'left-over' rather than planning the space first and allowing the buildings to define it.

- Consider building heights in relation the distance between them
- Maintain a continuous frontage or building line
- Provide proper front boundary treatments
- Use trees and vegetation to define space
- Create streets defined by buildings rather than traffic needs
- Design buildings on corners with greater height

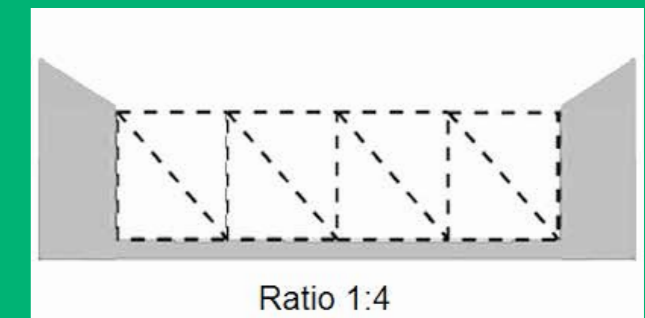


Buildings on corners should be taller to help maintain enclosure.

There is a general consensus that the height to width ratio between buildings to maintain successful enclosure on a street is about 1:2



For squares and public spaces a successful ratio is approximately 1:4



These are of course rules of thumb but some of the most successful streets and squares that we know and love are based on this principle.

Buildings built to the 'back of pavement' as in many urban areas, generally result in strong enclosure but even here there is still the opportunity to have a small area of semi private space to the front .



Streets where parking is provided to the front gardens and roads and footpaths are wide don't follow the rule of thumb and can feel uncomfortable. Well placed trees, landscape planting and boundary fences should be designed into the development to improve enclosure.



Building design

In the same way a neighbourhood should have character, so the buildings should also have a positive distinctive character. Traditionally the architectural style in a region was dictated by local materials and building skills, local climate conditions, topography etc. This created a link between architecture and the people who lived in the buildings. Modern industrialised construction techniques and ease of transport destroyed these local traditions. Nowadays any style of building can be built anywhere in the country. This has led to a loss of local character in architecture. It has often been said that modern developments could be anywhere but feel like nowhere.

Obviously we cannot return to the good old days but modern building techniques can create their own solutions which are interesting, varied and rich.

1. Use the scale and shape of the buildings to create form rather than relying on pointless materials elements such as gables over windows or 'feature' brickwork.
2. Limit the range of materials to a simple palette ie brickwork and stone or robust cladding.
3. Consider any local materials and regional details such as rooflines, scale and window proportions.
4. Use significant corners and gateways as places to add interest through height, materials or detailing. Conversely these are not the areas to locate meter boxes, bin stores or external soil vent pipes!
5. Always consider how an individual dwelling sits with its neighbours rather than as a separate entity. Detailing and proportions should sit well with adjoining buildings. We are trying to create great places not just a good looking house.



Contemporary designed houses can sit comfortably their older neighbours



Well proportioned and simple housing that works well as a terrace

Often designers think that a scheme will be more interesting if a variety of materials and 'features' are added to the buildings however too much variety is as bad as too little, leading to confusing places with no strong character. In residential design it is often the case that less is more. Avoid stick on details that add nothing to functionality. The house (right) has added on references from many different eras. This type of 'fussy' development would actually look better (and would be cheaper to build and maintain) if it was simpler.



We never build just one house so we should never design a house in isolation and then see how it fits into the rest of the street scene. The whole design – from its overall massing to specific details such as the proportion of the windows should be looked at as a whole composition that sits comfortably in the neighbourhood and with itself.



Style versus design

1

Everyone loves a Georgian houses like the one on the right but probably doesn't know why. The elevations have been very well considered using established principles at the time. It is proportioned so that the windows are sized in relationship to the height of the rooms inside. The smaller glass panes were a result of the restrictions on manufacturing of glass at the time. Overall the elevation 'sits' well on the street with its neighbours. This is a building of its time.



2

Compare this with the modern developers 'Georgian style' equivalent so prevalent in Britain today. Windows are meagre because the room behind has low ceilings and are sized to allow the minimum amount of light required to comply with modern regulations. The stone quoins are there to make the house look more interesting but creates a confusion of styles. Finally the solar panels make a mockery of its historical pretense. In short, copying elements of history without understanding it results in a pastiche which looks like a poor relation of its predecessor.



3

- The outside should reflect what is going on inside.
- The height and proportion of the buildings should reflect the sizes of the spaces they front on to rather than merely meeting the housing mix demands.
- The shape of the roof or position of gables can add height or interest where required.
- The size and position of windows should be specific to solar orientation and views to and from the site.
- Where there are no useful visual clues to help with the detail design the architecture should relate to itself and form part of a larger whole.



Rather than picking a style to copy from the past we need to develop a simpler form for modern housing without needless 'add ons' with an understanding modern materials, natural daylight, sustainability requirements, new technology – ie a building of our own time suitable to today's lifestyles.

Windows and daylighting

The size and position of windows and doors are what gives a building much of its character. The size and locations of windows can have other more subtle effects. For example a tall window will let more light into the back of a room, a low sill allows views out for people who may be wheelchair bound and creates a better link to the outside spaces. Also as mentioned earlier windows from principle rooms provide natural surveillance and bay windows will allow residents views down the street.



Because of their superior maintenance and performance characteristics, uPVC windows are preferred but please remember that generally section sizes for uPVC are large and can dramatically reduce glazed area in smaller openings especially if the window also has several transoms and opening lights.

- Consider window design when drawing plans and how they will affect the character of the building on the outside
- Living areas and kitchen/dining rooms need more daylight than bedrooms, but all parts of the home should receive good levels of daylight
- Create a balance between the requirement for light and ventilation in a room and the need to create a harmonious facade on the street
- When windows are confined to one wall, the room should not be more than 6m deep and ideally not exceed 4m
- Higher level glazing admits more daylight than low level
- Avoid over complicated window patterns, additional mullions and transoms just restrict light and restrict views out
- Side hung windows that allow for cleaning of the whole window from the inside are preferred to reduce ongoing costs for the residents.



Two examples of simple well proportioned window designs



Front doors are important as they create the transition from the outside world to the home. They should be visible from the street and located to provide shelter to visitors with either recessed porches or projecting canopies but these should be considered as a part of the whole street scene.

The entrance should be obvious and welcoming. For security, it should be possible to see who is calling either with a spy hole in the door or preferably via a side window or adjacent bay window.



This window pattern suits the materials used in the wall

Communal spaces in buildings

Most people prefer to have their own private front door to their dwelling accessed from ground level off a street and the decision to vary from this and provide any shared space in our buildings needs to be considered carefully. Our preference is to not have any shared spaces as this adds service charges for residents and

can be a source of dispute and conflict. Even relatively high density of developments are achievable without the need to arrange accommodation around vertical circulation and communal areas.

Where shared space is provided please consider the following:

1. Shared spaces need to be robust and easy to clean. Materials used in private dwellings will probably not be robust enough for communal areas.
2. Ensure there is adequate natural light and ventilation. Views out are also important. Apartments arranged on both sides of a corridor should have natural light and be well ventilated. Despite a poor reputation based on 1960s models, deck access flats can be a more attractive alternative.
3. Consider the number of dwellings the communal space serves. Remember that the costs associated with the space are shared among the residents it serves. Lifts, lighting, fire alarm systems, door entry systems etc eventually need to be replaced.
4. Shared spaces should be large enough to be functional for the number of residents they serve. Spaces need to be wide enough to allow wheelchairs and buggies to pass. Consider the social aspects of the space as a place to meet, also think about deliveries, bicycles, bins and other activities that may occur.
5. Door access systems are often a source of frustration for residents and our management staff alike. We describe our preferred system in our Employers Requirements document but always agree the specific details with our management staff.
6. The arrangements for postal delivery can be complex in buildings with communal entrances and should be discussed and agreed at an early stage in the design. Letter boxes and utility meters need to be accessible but secure from theft and vandalism.
7. Residents who own and use bicycles will require storage outside of their apartment. Internal secure storage is the preferred method but if it is outside it should be in a well overlooked area rather than 'tucked round the back' where theft and vandalism is easy.

Car parking

The way we deal with the car can determine the whole look and feel of a housing scheme and is a major challenge for designers. Recent studies suggest that a range of parking solutions should be adopted rather than a single approach across a scheme. The obvious factors affecting the choice of a parking solution is the proposed density of the scheme and the percentage requirement for parking provision by planning authorities and our housing services team. If a high percentage of parking is required in an already dense scheme the car will end up dominating the street.



When parking isn't planned properly residents will park in areas that cause obstruction and nuisance

On street parking is a reality of modern life which can have benefits of enlivening the street scene, slowing down traffic and even facilitating social interaction with neighbours. Unallocated spaces for the use of everyone allows parking provision to be lower as all spaces will be used by car owners rather than lying empty on someone's driveway.



Generally the most favoured solution for Great Places is provision of allocated in-curtilage parking to the side of a house (possibly 2 cars in tandem) to reduce the impact of cars on the street. Parking to the front of the house requires longer front gardens and distances the dwelling from the street. (see enclosure) A denser scheme comprising a long terrace with 2 parking spaces to the front of each house will create a hard and ugly street scene and without some imaginative landscape solutions will struggle to be an attractive place.



- Don't rely on a single parking treatment
Use a range of parking solutions
- Design streets to accommodate street parking and allow for trees
- Design out antisocial parking areas
- Enable people to see their cars from their houses
- Avoid large rear parking courts or parking which isn't overlooked
- Don't rely on having to introduce yellow lines and parking permits.
- Soften front parking in front of homes with planting and trees



Communal parking where provided should always be well thought out not be too big so as to dominate the street and be to the fronts of houses in areas which are well overlooked.

Many schemes have tried to reduce cars on the street by providing rear parking courts (top right). These are generally not successful, creating unsupervised areas, encouraging crime. Parking is often too far away from front doors so the back doors become the main entrance and the street less active. The need to reduce crime sometimes requires us to provide resident only access with automatic gates but these require a service charge to be levied on our residents and constantly break down causing us an ongoing maintenance cost.



Undercroft parking is an attractive solution in denser urban areas and can provide up to 2 tandem spaces per dwelling while keeping a strong street frontage. These work particularly well with larger properties with more bedrooms to the first floor. The obvious disadvantage is additional construction cost involved.

Safety and security

Careful design of spaces can help reduce but never eradicate crime. However we do know that a place is safer when it is able to be overlooked by the occupants of houses around it. If a space feels dangerous or uninviting then it will never be well used. If it isn't well used it becomes even less safe - a vicious circle. On the other hand if a space is popular and well used at all times of the day people feel safer using it.



It is very important that people understand what is private space and what is public. By organising buildings so that they front on to the street a private space is created to the rear. This private space works best when it adjoins other private spaces rather than creating an uneasy boundary with public areas or roads. Traditionally this has resulted in perimeter blocks which serve well but with the need to accommodate more car parking the design needs to be carefully considered to ensure the built form is maintained.

- Make sure that public spaces are overlooked by the fronts of buildings
- Put 'eyes on streets' and minimise exposed blank windowless gables
- Ensure that windows and front doors are positioned to provide overlooking of public spaces around the home avoiding windowless gables on to public spaces
- Position houses as close to the street as possible and not set back with long front gardens.
- Avoid high boundary walls against the street.
- Avoid steps and setbacks in buildings that provide places for people to hide
- Design a network of connected well used streets, rather than quiet cul-de-sacs
- Create social interaction by locating parking in front or 'on-street'
- Be careful not to make planting too high or dense to create hiding areas
- Don't build homes that back on to streets
- Encourage Footfall through a scheme on well overlooked routes
- Develop a scheme that adheres with the basic principles of secure by design.



Avoid reliance on unsafe underpasses etc as a main route to shops, schools etc.



Dealing with bins

Many schemes have been let down because designers have not considered how to deal with the many different bins and they become an unsightly nuisance. It is a problem so widespread that the government has made it a statutory requirement to consider bins properly as part of the building regulations:

“Unsightly bins can damage the visual amenity of an area and contribute to increased levels of anti-social nuisance such as odour and litter, so bin storage should be planned carefully.”

Building regulations part H



A good example of bin storage

- General preference is for bins to be stored in rear gardens with easy access to the street for collection
- Semi detached houses can achieve this in the most effective way whereas longer terraces will require rear access paths which could become a nuisance or a source of anti social behaviour
- Provide front bin stores in robust enclosures. This should be considered in more dense urban schemes especially if parking is provided in-curtilage to the front
- Avoid communal bins for terraced houses.

Flats and other schemes requiring communal bin stores require careful consideration. The distance from dwellings so that residents will use it, access for collection, visual intrusion on the street, potential for vandalism or arson, smells and ventilation etc. are all factors which should be discussed by the design team. No one should have a view of or worse still the smell of bins from their window. Generally flat dwellers accept that they will have a communal bin store but it is much more difficult for house dwellers to accept that they don't have their own bins.

Bin stores to apartments should be:

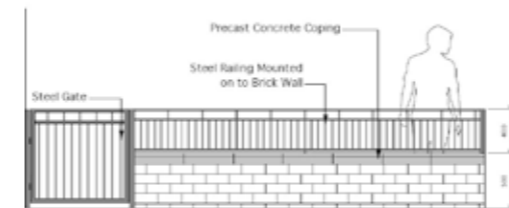
- Accessible to wheelchair users
- Well-lit and ventilated
- Fitted with robust, scratch resistant, lockable, metal doors
- Fitted with a tap and floor gulley (within a concrete floor laid to falls) and suitable for hosing down.



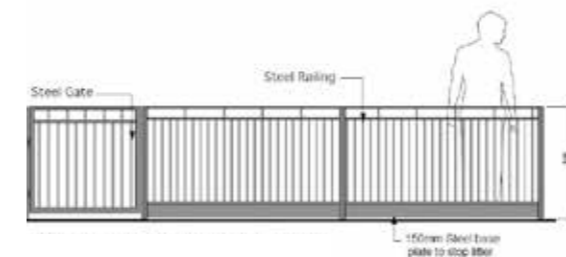
A bad example of bin storage

Fences and boundaries

There is truth in the old adage “good fences make good neighbours”. Unlike most private developer led schemes we generally prefer to have proper fences to the fronts of our houses. The nature of this will vary depending on the character of the road the boundary face.



On a busy urban street or on a vulnerable corner plot we would expect to see a low brick wall and railing.



On less busy streets robust metal railings (with a litter plate to the bottom) would suffice.

In a more secluded cul de sac where passing traffic is limited we will consider not having any railings and rely on robust planting instead but this would need to be agreed with our housing services colleagues.

Experience has shown us that timber boundary fences or worse still, timber knee rails to the front of our properties is a long term maintenance liability which we do not want to take on. The traditional hedge boundary can become unsightly over time because it requires a level of upkeep that many residents are unable to commit to. Other types of robust low maintenance planting may be suitable in less busy developments but certainly not on major urban routes.



- Take into account the need to provide security and enclosure
- To the rears we generally are happy with robust timber fencing
- Avoid the rear boundary being adjacent to a street or publicly accessible space
- Provide a more robust brickwork wall rather than timber to boundaries adjoining public spaces.

Landscape

Research has shown that access to green space is beneficial to people's health.

The introduction of trees, vegetation or water is an important element in the creation of high quality neighbourhoods. Trees and planting on residential streets improve the environment in a variety of ways. The CABE report 'the value of public space' provided evidence that well considered landscape can increase the saleability and value of homes.



Early consideration of landscape in a residential layout can provide a cost effective way of dealing with requirements for surface water run off by providing attractive features such as swales.



Plant deciduous trees to south facing gardens to reduce summer overheating.

- Small front gardens should be hard landscaped with well selected shrubs rather than grassed
- Make sure that there are no tiny squares of grass behind sheds or between paths etc
- Below railings always provide a paved mowing strip or use shrubs against a fence as an alternative
- Avoid loose materials such as bark or gravel as they can be scattered everywhere
- Ensure that proper upstand edgings are provided to reduce overspill of soil etc
- Existing trees can be a valuable asset and when designing a scheme always consider if they can be incorporated into the layout rather than assuming that they will be removed
- Small areas should have shrub planting rather than grass which grows quickly and can look unkempt in a matter of days
- Trees can add enclosure to a street scene or hide less attractive features.

It must be remembered however that landscape requires maintenance. Trees or planting should only be provided when there is a clear strategy in place to maintain them - preferably by the council. Keep in mind that where this isn't possible, maintenance will be paid for by the residents through a service charge and species should be selected with this in mind. Access for maintenance is also an important factor when choosing where to plant.



Hedges can become overgrown and become unsightly very quickly

Conclusion

Good design is arguably more important in housing than for any other building type because of the extent to which the quality of our home affects the quality of our life. The quality of the housing we build directly affects the lives of individuals, families and the wider community. The RIBA produced a report in 2011 entitled 'Good Design – It all adds up' which stated:

"Nowhere do we feel the benefit of good design more than in our own homes and the spaces around them. We eat sleep, work, rest and play here...We know what makes a good home. It should offer enough room to accommodate it's occupants and their lifestyles in comfort, in peaceful, secure, private space and use energy efficiently. It's surroundings or neighbourhood should provide a balance between private, semi-private and public space..."

We at Great Places fully subscribe to this statement and hope that this design guide assists designers to do the best they can to design residential schemes which are built to last, function well and make our residents feel well and happy in their home.