



# Planning for Town Centres: Guidance on Design and Implementation tools

## 1. Purpose of Guidance

- 1.1 This Guidance deals specifically with design issues relating to planning for town centres and some of the main tools available to secure the implementation of town centre planning policies and proposals. It supports Planning Policy Statement 6: Planning for Town Centres (PPS6) which sets out the Government's policy in England on planning for the future of town centres and the main uses that relate to them.
- 1.2 Although the Guidance does not form part of PPS6, it should be taken into account by planning authorities in developing relevant planning policies and may be relevant in the determination of planning applications.

## 2. Design and the Public Realm

- 2.1 Planning Policy Statement 1: Delivering Sustainable Development (PPS1) sets out the Government's overarching policy on design matters. PPS1 is clear that good design is indivisible from good planning. It states that design which is inappropriate in its context, or which fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions, should not be accepted. Good practice in planning for the achievement of high quality and inclusive design is set out in *By Design, Urban Design in the Planning System: Towards Better Practice*; *Safer Places: The Planning System and Crime Prevention*; and *Planning and Access for Disabled People: A Good Practice Guide*.
- 2.2 PPS6 states that it is essential that town centres provide a high-quality and safe environment if they are to remain attractive and competitive and that policies for the design of development for main town centre uses, regardless of location, and for development in town centres, should promote high quality and inclusive design, in order to improve the character and quality of the area in which such development is located and the way it functions.

## **DESIGN PRINCIPLES**

- 2.3 Within the overarching design policy provided by PPS1 and the policy in PPS6, the following design principles should also be taken into account.
- 2.4 Development should:
- normally be orientated so that it fronts the street;
  - respect building lines of the existing urban environment and, where appropriate, build up to the edge of the curtilage;
  - maximise the amount of active street frontage;
  - avoid designs which are inward looking and which present blank frontages;
  - provide level access from the public realm; and
  - in the case of development in edge-of-centre locations, provide good pedestrian access to the centre.
- 2.5 Developments with innovative layouts which maximise the use of a site and, where appropriate, make use of multiple levels should be encouraged, having regard to local context.
- 2.6 The design of buildings and shopfronts which are based on a standard design that is not well integrated with its local context should be avoided.
- 2.7 Roofscape design should be carefully considered within the wider context, with any adverse visual impact of rooftop servicing minimised.

## **LANDSCAPE**

- 2.8 The treatment of hard and soft landscaping within a development is of considerable importance and should be considered from the outset of the design process to ensure that it complements the architecture of proposals and improves the overall quality of the existing townscape. Townscape views into and out of larger sites should also be carefully considered from the start of the design process.

## **PARKING**

- 2.9 Large amounts of surface level parking are likely to detract from the overall appearance of a development and its surrounding area and are unlikely to maximise the development potential of available land.
- 2.10 Car parking and service areas should be carefully located within a development so as to minimise visual impact. Car parking should normally be located to the rear, underneath or, where appropriate, above new development.
- 2.11 Where surface car parking is proposed, this should be conceived within the overall landscape proposals for the development and link into the wider area. Multi-storey car parking should also be carefully designed and be well integrated with its surroundings. Pedestrian access, security, lighting, signing and publicity, management and maintenance are all important design considerations. Where rooftop car parking is proposed, lighting should be designed sensitively to minimise the level of light pollution to the surroundings.

## PUBLIC REALM AND ACCESS

- 2.12 Through their planning and design policies and proposals, local planning authorities should create high-quality streets and public spaces. Street furniture and signs, if not well designed and co-ordinated, can cause visual clutter. Local planning authorities should work in partnership with other stakeholders, including the local highway authority, on the provision, rationalisation and maintenance of street furniture, signage and paving, to improve the streetscape and produce high-quality, accessible and coherent pedestrian environments. Pedestrian links between the primary shopping area and the wider town centre should where possible be strengthened, in particular with adjoining areas of secondary shopping importance, where links with the primary shopping area are often of critical importance.
- 2.13 Local authorities should seek to improve access to and from town centres by all modes of transport, but in particular pedestrian access from the main point of arrival (such as bus or railway stations or car parks) to the main attractions, such as the primary shopping area. Improving the pedestrian environment of a town centre, including areas beyond the primary shopping area, can make a significant contribution to its overall attractiveness and competitiveness. Guidance on managing public spaces in town centres is given in *Managing Urban Spaces in Town Centres*.
- 2.14 Local authorities should:
- seek to improve the quality, convenience and safety<sup>1</sup> of access on foot, by bicycle and public transport in an inclusive way<sup>2</sup>, including where appropriate, consider drawing up and implementing a strategy for improving pedestrian routes to and within the town centre; and
  - closely integrate proposals to improve accessibility with improvements to traffic management and the management of car parking.
- 2.15 Guidance on improving access to town centres is given in *Going to Town: Improving Town Centre Access*. See also *Walking and Cycling Action Plan* (DfT, TINF391) and *Walking and Cycling Action Plan: Success Stories* (DfT, TINF965).

<sup>1</sup> Further guidance is set out in *Safer Places: The Planning System and Crime Prevention* (ODPM/Home Office, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Further guidance on access and inclusion, and a definition of inclusive design is included in *Planning and Access for Disabled People: A Good Practice Guide* (ODPM, 2003).

## 3. Implementation Tools

- 3.1 As a focus for new development, investment and community activity, town centres require careful and detailed planning and management. There are a range of tools available to secure the implementation of town centre policies and proposals and secure vital and viable town centres. Taking account of the community strategy and liaising closely with their local strategic partnership, local planning authorities should engage with the community and stakeholders (including businesses) to ensure they are able to contribute to shaping the future development and management of their town centres.

### LOCAL DEVELOPMENT DOCUMENTS

- 3.2 The most important planning tools at the local level will be the relevant local development documents. In particular, local planning authorities should make effective use of the core strategy and area action plan development plan documents (where the latter are needed), to establish an effective spatial planning framework within which to reach robust decisions on planning applications.
- 3.3 The types of issues which should be considered for inclusion in relevant local development documents include:
- identifying the capacity of each centre to accommodate growth, as set out in the relevant development plan document, and make provision for its accommodation;
  - providing a comprehensive plan for an area of renewal or development;
  - addressing the location and layout of new development;
  - developing an urban design strategy, which establishes a comprehensive urban design vision and is supported by specific urban design policies, guidelines or proposals for specific sites;
  - addressing the spatial implications of strategies for parking, traffic management and improvement of the pedestrian environment; and
  - setting out a detailed implementation programme for bringing forward development on key sites, including, where appropriate, proposals for addressing particular issues such as land assembly through compulsory purchase orders.
- 3.4 Area Action Plans will be the key tool for addressing local, site-specific issues in areas where significant change or conservation is needed and where specific site allocations need to be made.
- 3.5 Local planning authorities should draw up master plans or development briefs for key sites or areas which are suitable for town centre uses. Such guidance should include a clear urban design framework which should be developed in conjunction with the community and stakeholders, including potential developers, investors and occupiers. Master plans, detailed planning or development briefs for key town centre sites or areas are best prepared as supplementary planning documents. Planning Policy Statement 12: Local Development Frameworks (PPS12) sets out the Government's policy on the preparation of local development documents.

## TOWN CENTRE STRATEGIES AND OTHER TOOLS

- 3.6 In partnership with the private sector, property owners, infrastructure agencies and the community, local planning authorities should, where strategies do not already exist, consider whether a town centre strategy should be prepared to complement relevant local development documents. Town centre strategies can significantly assist in delivering effective management and promotion of town centres. In developing a town centre strategy, it is important to:
- draw up a profile of the centre which identifies its essential qualities and seek to ensure that it continues to meet the needs of the community it serves by consolidating and building on existing strengths;
  - assess the role of the centre and the need and scope for change, renewal and diversification;
  - draw up a shared vision, a strategy and action plan for the centre which can inform and be informed by any relevant development plan document; and
  - develop a centre management strategy or initiative, which may include proposals to address issues such as managing the evening and late-night economy, shop-front design, tackling crime and transport issues. An important component of this will be to consider appointing a town centre manager (for centres too small to support a town centre manager, the sharing of such a post between several centres may be an option).
- 3.7 The principles of good practice for town centre partnerships and strategies, together with examples, may be found in the good practice guidance *Town Centre Partnerships* (DETR/ATCM, 1997). Guidance on preparing strategies for smaller centres will be published separately.
- 3.8 Compulsory purchase powers are an important tool available to local planning authorities and other public bodies to use in assembling the land needed to bring forward suitable sites for development and secure additional capacity within or on the edge of town centres to accommodate growth and/or to deliver effective and efficient regeneration and the promotion of business. Circular 6/2004 provides updated and revised guidance on the use of compulsory purchase powers.
- 3.9 Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) provide local authorities and local businesses with the opportunity of working together to put in place additional services or projects to improve their town centres. BIDs are funded by an additional levy on the business rate. The details of each BID scheme, including the nature of the improvements and the size of the addition to the rates, will be for the businesses affected to agree upon and they would vote in a ballot upon the agreed proposal. The Business Improvement Districts (England) Regulations 2004 set out the framework within which BIDs can be brought forward.

## Further Information

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Published by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. Printed in the UK, March 2005 on material comprising 100% post consumer waste.

Product code 04 PD 02984