



Chapter 7

Delivering High
Quality Places

CHAPTER 7 – DELIVERING HIGH QUALITY PLACES

- 7.1 Cambridge is internationally famous for the quality of its built environment. An essential part of the character of the City stems from the spaces and grounds around buildings and the important role of trees and other landscape features. The interface between the urban edge and the countryside is important to the setting of Cambridge.
- 7.2 High quality design is a key aspect of sustainable development and should contribute positively to making places better for people. It should draw together the many strands of creating successful places. This involves the consideration of elements such as architectural design, landscape design and engineering to create places that maintain and enhance the distinctive and historic character of the city. It also provides an opportunity to deliver elements that will benefit existing communities, for example through the provision of new and enhancement of existing public realm. Given the economic vibrancy of the city and the need in particular to accommodate new housing, Cambridge has the opportunity to support some of the very best designed buildings and spaces in the country.
- 7.3 This section addresses the many elements that need to be considered as part of development proposals to ensure that they deliver a high quality of design, both of new buildings and the spaces around those buildings.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY

Option 60 – Delivering High Quality Places

Development will be of the highest design quality to continue Cambridge's tradition of innovation and quality, supporting a city with a high quality of life and amenity. This would apply to both buildings and the spaces around buildings.

Key Facts

DESIGN

- The first phase of the Accordia Development on Brooklands Avenue won the RIBA Stirling Prize in 2008, as a result of the design and quality of the scheme. It was the first residential development to win this award in the UK.
- The current Designing Cambridge policies of the 2006 Local Plan (3/4, 3/7 and 3/12) are amongst the most used policies in determining planning applications. These policies consider the development's interaction with its context; its overall quality and accessibility, sustainability and scale; and they have been tested at appeal on numerous occasions.
- Design quality continues to remain an important consideration in Cambridge with the continuing support of the Design and Conservation Panel and the Cambridgeshire Quality Panel. These panels, along with Council officers specialised in design and conservation, provide the

Council with access to high quality advice and guidance on all matters related to design of the built environment.

PUBLIC REALM

- Some of the key qualities of Cambridge’s public realm, which add considerably to the quality and variety to the city’s townscape include:
 - Railing’s and bollards (many designed and manufactured in the city), historic telephone and post boxes, the ‘Richardson Candle’ streetlights and cast iron street name plates, which all add an element of quality and distinctiveness and enhance the character of the City Centre;
 - The use of quality materials such as cobbles, setts and York stone paving to add texture and interest to the townscape;
- Public realm works undertaken in recent years have tried to respect a tradition of quality detailing. The setts in Green Street, the Totem at the top of Magdalene Street, the bronze flowers in the Bridge Street pavement, the new stone paving and models on Senate House Hill, have all helped create interest and individuality within the public realm;
- The Cluster Study¹ recognises the contribution that quality of life and the attractiveness of Cambridge as a place to live and work makes in maintaining the economic vibrancy of the central areas of Cambridge. High quality public realm also plays a wider role in the creation of sustainable, inclusive and mixed communities as well as attractive and usable places.

LANDSCAPE

- Green Belt land encircles the city and green corridors extend into the heart of the city.
- Cambridge is a compact city with a thriving historic core. The city is encircled by a relatively flat rural setting. As a result of the long and short views of the city afforded from a number of vantage points outside the city and the interaction of the built environment with the surrounding Green Belt, the urban edge of the city is very sensitive to change;
- The approaches to Cambridge play a key role in how the city is perceived, particularly its character and scale;
- The Backs, the commons, the green corridors and the River Cam corridor are an essential (defining) characteristic of the city and must be protected and enhanced;
- The open spaces within the city, along with the River Cam and other

¹ SQW (2011). [Cambridge Cluster at 50. The Cambridge economy: retrospect and prospect](#). Final report to EEDA and partners

water bodies, are part of Cambridge's green and blue infrastructure network and should enable recreation, sport, biodiversity, climate change management, amenity and cultural facilities;

- The interrelationship between defined open spaces and their surroundings are fundamental to the character of Cambridge.

PUBLIC ART

- The 2006 Public Art Audit identified 43 public artworks within Cambridge, including statues, fountains, murals, mosaics, mobiles, abstract sculpture, engraved glass, paving insets, street furniture, war memorials and bronze and stone relief's. The Audit noted that there were no public art works located within any of Cambridge's Local Centres and as such the Public Art SPD sets out Local and District Centres as priority areas for the provision of public art;
- The Council undertook a survey in 2008 to establish awareness and attitudes to public art. The results suggest that:
 - There is strong support for the role of public art in place making, promoting art and giving Cambridge a positive image.
 - People think that public art should emphasise quality of life and people, history, diversity and creativity;
 - There is strong support for the location of public art outside the City Centre in Local Centres and on areas of public open space.
- New public artworks include the 'Skystation' interactive sculptural seating at George Nuttall Close, which was commissioned by Miller Homes and designed by the artist Peter Newman and the 'Swift Tower' commissioned by the Council and designed by Andrew Merritt.

Objectives

- To create inclusive places that foster a sense of community, integrating new and existing communities;
- To require a high quality of design which respects and enhances the character of Cambridge and its setting;
- To ensure that new development maintains and enhances the setting of Cambridge including key views into and out of the city;
- To maintain and enhance the network of green infrastructure in the city and ensure that these are multi-functional;
- To ensure that new development is successfully integrated into and enhances the surrounding landscape;
- To sponsor innovative architecture and design of the highest quality in new development;
- To deliver public art as an integral element of high quality public realm, that reinforces local distinctiveness and cultural identity with each

artwork specific to its location.

- 7.4 Urban design involves the design of buildings, groups of buildings, spaces and landscapes that facilitate successful development.²
- 7.5 The process of masterplanning involves the overlapping of layers including movement and access, land use, open space and landscape, built form and massing and phasing to create a framework for new development. The challenge for Cambridge is to ensure that these considerations are combined and detailed in such a way as to create high quality places. New development needs to respect the heritage of the city, and be of a high quality design, reflecting a sense of civic pride and incorporating aspects such as public art. Development must accommodate growth in a sustainable manner with high quality design and sustainable design being mutually inclusive.

Ensuring that new development responds to its context

- 7.6 New development should be of a high quality of design in order to create places that are enduring, robust and complement and enhance the existing character of Cambridge. An essential part of achieving this aim is to ensure that the context of any proposal is considered as part of the design process. Context describes the setting of a site or area including land uses, the built and natural environment and social and physical characteristics. Proposals for new development should create a scale and form that is appropriate to the existing buildings and complements the local identity of an area. This is critical to successful place making and is echoed in the NPPF with specific reference made to the importance of the integration of new development into the natural, built and historic environment³.
- 7.7 Only one policy option has been put forward because ensuring that all new development responds to its context is crucial if the distinctiveness and special character of Cambridge is to be protected and enhanced. A thorough analysis of the site context enables a site-specific response to the design of new developments. Of particular importance when considering the context of a site, is consideration of the landscape context of the site. This should include green (open space), grey (built form/public realm) or blue (watercourses) infrastructure. While it is considered that there are no reasonable alternatives, there may be variations within the criteria identified that could be considered.

Option 61 – Criteria based responding to context policy

This option would allow for the development of a criteria based policy to ensure that all new developments respond to local character and distinctiveness and reflect the identity of local surroundings, while not preventing appropriate innovation. The criteria could include:

- The need to identify and respond positively to existing features of

² Cowan, R (2005). The dictionary of urbanism, Streetwise Press

³ Paragraph 62 of the National Planning Policy Framework (CLG, 2012)

natural, historic or local importance on and close to the proposed development site;

- The need to be well connected to and integrated with, the immediate locality and wider city; and
- The need to use the characteristics of the local area to help inform the siting, massing, building and landscape design and materials used in the proposed development.

Proposals for development should use studies (or any future updates thereto) such as the Cambridge Landscape Character Assessment, Cambridgeshire Green Infrastructure Strategy 2011, Nature Conservation Strategy, Conservation Area Appraisals and the Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Record. Compliance with this policy option would be demonstrated through the submission of a Design and Access Statement.

Such a policy would build on policy 3/4 of the 2006 Local Plan.

Such an approach would clearly identify the importance of understanding the context of any new development. The consideration of context and an appropriate response to it is fundamental to the creation of well-designed places.

Questions

- 7.1 Is there a need for a policy addressing this issue?
- 7.2 Are there any points which have been missed and you feel should be added (perhaps even an entirely new option)?
- 7.3 Are there any other reasonable alternatives that should be considered at this stage?

The role of good design in delivering high quality places

- 7.8 Having addressed context, the next issue to consider is how to create a successful place. Place making is an essential component of high quality development and when done well will either create somewhere with a distinct identity⁴ or reinforce the identity of an existing place. Ultimately developments that are well integrated with their surroundings and have responded positively to the constraints and opportunities of a particular site will be more successful than those that do not take such an approach.
- 7.9 Only one policy option has been put forward because ensuring high quality urban design is crucial if the distinctiveness and special character of Cambridge is to be protected and enhanced. The NPPF is clear that high quality design is vital in creating successful places. A criteria based policy approach will ensure that due consideration is given to all aspects of good design that should be integrated into the design process for all development.

⁴ Cowan 2008: 292

While it is considered that there are no reasonable alternatives, there may be variations within the criteria identified that could be considered.

Option 62 – Criteria based policy for delivering high quality places

This option would allow for the development of a criteria based policy setting out the quality of development that will be expected in Cambridge. Criteria could include:

- The interrelations and integrations between buildings, routes and spaces;
- The development of a hierarchy of streets;
- The creation of attractive built frontages;
- The orientation of buildings to overlook public spaces and promote natural surveillance;
- Activating edges onto public spaces by locating building entrances and windows of habitable rooms next to the street;
- The provision of clearly distinct public and private spaces;
- The integration of affordable and supported housing to minimise social exclusion;
- Designing out crime;
- The use of materials, finishes and street furniture suitable to location and context;
- The integration of landscape design into the design of developments as a whole;
- Measures for the improvement and enhancement of public realm close to the development;
- Provision of adequate management and maintenance of the development;
- The inclusion of public art as an integral part of new developments; and
- Consideration of the needs of those with disabilities

The comprehensive criterion based assessment above comes from Policy 3/7 of the 2006 Local Plan, and can be used as the basis for this new policy.

Such an approach would make clear the aspects that would need to be demonstrated in development proposals for them to be considered acceptable. This methodology forms a fundamental element of good architectural and design practice and as such would not place additional requirements on developers.

Questions

- 7.4 Is there a need for a policy addressing this issue?
- 7.5 Are there any points which have been missed and you feel should be added (perhaps even an entirely new option)?
- 7.6 Are there any other reasonable alternatives that should be considered at this stage?

High quality design of buildings

- 7.10 High quality building design is linked to context, in terms of appropriateness, and to place making in terms of how proposed development will be sited. Without imposing architectural tastes or styles it is still important that proposed development is considered in terms of the site location, height, scale and form, along with materials and detailing with the latter linking directly to the quality and durability of a proposal. Early consideration of functional elements such as bins, bicycles, bikes and cars is crucial in achieving high quality development that deals effectively with the associated paraphernalia of day to day living.
- 7.11 Only one policy option has been put forward because ensuring high quality design is crucial if the distinctiveness and special character of Cambridge is to be protected and enhanced. The NPPF is clear that high quality design is vital in creating successful places. A criteria based policy approach will ensure that due consideration is given to all aspects of good design that should be integrated into the design process for all development. While it is considered that there are no reasonable alternatives, there may be variations within the criteria identified that could be considered, or criteria that have been overlooked.

Option 63 – Criteria based policy for the design of buildings

This option would allow for the development of a criteria based policy setting out the requirements for new buildings and refurbishment of existing buildings. The criteria could include:

- New buildings should be of the highest architectural quality. The design of buildings should have a positive contribution to their setting in terms of location on the site, height, scale and form, materials, detailing, wider townscape and landscape impacts and available views;
- Consideration of the relationship between the landscape design and the character and function of the spaces and surrounding buildings;
- The need to demonstrate that buildings are convenient, safe and accessible for all users and visitors; and
- The need for buildings to be constructed in a sustainable manner, easily adaptable for different uses and our changing climate, and which successfully integrates recycling and refuse facilities, cycle and car parking, plant and other services into the design.

- Consideration of the potential to support biodiversity within the built environment.

Such an approach clearly sets out the elements that are important in the development of well-designed buildings, providing certainty while at the same time allowing for innovative approaches to design.

Questions

- 7.7 Is there a need for a policy addressing this issue?
- 7.8 Are there any points which may have been missed and you feel should be added (perhaps even an entirely new option)?
- 7.9 Do you think that we should be promoting contemporary architecture or will the proposed policy stifle innovative design?
- 7.10 Are there any other reasonable alternatives that should be considered at this stage?

Design of the public realm, landscape and external spaces

- 7.12 The design of spaces around buildings, both public and private, is as important as the design of the building itself. Successful landscape design will help integrate developments into their surroundings and enhance the function, character and amenity value of spaces and boundaries. Development proposals should identify and retain existing landscape features of value and incorporate these into the design proposals. Public spaces or the 'public realm' is where public life takes place and is much more than the space left between the boundaries of private property. It encompasses the entire transition from public space to private space, including views and visual relationships across the city and patterns of street enclosure. The public realm is the space that allows us to understand where we are, and where we are going, and is widely accepted as one of the key components of creating successful places.
- 7.13 Cambridge's public realm reflects the city's long and compelling heritage. It acts as a setting for Cambridge's wealth of historic buildings and therefore has an important role to play in maintaining and enhancing the city's unique character. A high quality of public realm can bring about a whole range of economic, social and environmental benefits, and improve quality of life.
- 7.14 New public realm and the design of external spaces must be informed by the heritage of the city, be of a high quality, be sustainable in design and reflect a sense of place. Public art plays a key role in reinforcing local distinctiveness and adding value to the overall streetscape design. In order to achieve a high quality public realm that is comfortable, stimulating and encourages social interaction, detailed attention to the structure of spaces and the elements contained within that space is required. Such an approach involves thinking about surfaces and materials, hard and soft landscapes, space for pedestrians and vehicles, issues of security, integration of public art, street furniture,

lighting and signage. This is not just an issue for the design and provision of new public realm, but also works to the existing streets and spaces within the city. It is important that such works respect the contribution that these spaces make to the character of the city.

- 7.15 Only one policy option has been put forward because ensuring high quality public realm design is crucial if the distinctive and special character of Cambridge is to be protected and enhanced. Accessibility and visibility of high quality external spaces is also critical to the health and well-being of all, and can have positive economic impacts, assisting regeneration. The NPPF asserts that in setting policies for the quality of development expected for an area, there should be the expectation that proposals will create and sustain an appropriate mix of uses including the incorporation of green and other public space. While it is considered that there are no reasonable alternatives, there may be variations within the criteria identified that could be considered.

Option 64 – The design of the Public Realm, Landscape and other External Spaces

This option would allow for the development of a criteria based policy for the design of public realm, landscape and other external spaces. Such criteria could include:

- The need for public realm and the design of external spaces to reflect the character and function of these spaces and their surroundings;
- The early identification, retention, protection and enhancement of existing features that positively contribute to the landscape character;
- The use of a high quality palette of materials that respond to context and provide a unifying theme and distinctive sense of identity to the locality;
- An integrated approach to the design and siting of street furniture, boundary treatments, public art and lighting;
- The retention and repair of historic street surfaces, including footpaths;
- Promotion of innovative public realm and street design in new and existing development to reflect guidance contained in Manual for Streets⁵ including shared space;
- The incorporation of trees and other planting, appropriate to the scale of buildings and the space available, to help green the city;
- Careful species selection for landscape proposals including consideration of the use of native species to help enhance biodiversity, species able to adapt to our changing climate;
- Coordinated provision of public realm/landscape/external spaces

⁵ Department for Transport (2007). [Manual for Streets](#).

between adjacent sites and phases of large developments;

- The need for external spaces and the public realm to be constructed in a sustainable manner, easily adaptable for different functions and our changing climate, and;
- The need to integrate surface water management proposals into the overall landscape design, to maximise the benefits of surface water management (see also Option 51 of the Sustainable Development, Climate Change, Water and Flooding chapter);
- Provision of high quality amenity space that receives adequate sunlight.

The advantage of such a policy approach is that it will enable the specific circumstances of each development proposal to be considered as part of the overall design process. As such it will help to ensure high quality design not just of buildings themselves, but the spaces between buildings, and help enhance the local built and natural environment.

Questions

7.11 Is there a need for a policy addressing this issue?

7.12 Are there any points which have been missed and you feel should be added (perhaps even an entirely new option)?

7.13 Given the guidance provided in documents such as Manual for Streets 1 and 2 and the Cambridgeshire Design Guide⁶, is there a need for a Supplementary Planning Document to provide further guidance to the above policy option?

7.14 Are there any other reasonable alternatives that should be considered at this stage?

Design Coding

- 7.16 The NPPF encourages the use of design codes. Two of the growth sites on Cambridge Southern Fringe already have design codes in place and further codes will be produced for sites on North-West Cambridge and at NIAB. Design Codes act as a bridge between the outline permission and subsequent reserved matters planning applications. Design codes are a set of illustrated design rules and requirements, which instruct and advise on the physical development of an area. They can be used to set requirements in relation to providing more detailed information on a range of design elements, such as the density and height of development, the hierarchy and design of streets and open spaces, best practices approaches to car parking, and the character of different parts of a development.

⁶ Cambridgeshire County Council (2007). [Cambridgeshire Design Guide for Streets and the Public Realm](#)

Option 65 – Requirement for the production of design codes in respect of growth areas for all outline planning applications

This option would allow for the development of a policy requiring all proposals in growth areas submitted for an outline planning application to produce a design code. Such a policy could include criteria setting out the minimum requirements for design codes, including:

- **Strategic Level:** Movement and access, land use, open space & sustainable drainage, built form and massing, phasing;
- **Detailed Level:** Street types, public realm and landscape, building typologies and parking.

Questions

7.15 Is there a need for a policy addressing this issue?

7.16 Are there any points which have been missed and you feel should be added (perhaps even an entirely new option)?

7.17 Are there any other reasonable alternatives that should be considered at this stage?

The importance of public art provision as part of new development

- 7.17 Very broadly, public art can be understood as a process of engaging artists' creative ideas in the public realm and with the community. Public art, permanent or temporary, in the form of sculptures or the ideas of artists integrated within the design of buildings and spaces, are features which involve the use of land, can require planning permission, and can affect the appearance of development.
- 7.18 In addition, public art has a key role to play in helping to provide social, economic, environmental and cultural benefits. Public art should enhance the fundamental principles of urban design and creating a high quality public realm. It can help to strengthen local distinctiveness and character, is important in the creation of a stimulating public realm, and helps to integrate new and existing communities. There is a very strong evidence base both nationally and internationally to support the benefits of the inclusion of public art within new development.
- 7.19 The Council's 2008 Public Art Survey showed strong support from the public for the role of public art and for its provision. Public art can be provided as a standalone project or it can be integrated into other infrastructure projects. For example through the provision of play areas or landscape and public realm design.
- 7.20 The Council understands the importance of public art and this is underlined by the proposal to include public art within the criteria based policy option for delivering high quality places (Option 62) and the policy option for the design of the public realm, landscape and external spaces (Option 64). Both

policies have been outlined above; these policy options will set out the quality of development that will be expected in Cambridge.

- 7.21 No standalone policy option is put forward for public art as it is included in a number of policy options above. However, we would like to use this opportunity to define what public art means from a Cambridge point of view.

Questions

7.18 Is there a need for a policy addressing this issue?

7.19 How would you define public art?

Extending and altering buildings

- 7.22 The extension of buildings can help to make the most efficient use of land, and can prolong the life of buildings or find new uses for them. It can often provide the only way in which additional accommodation can be provided for householders or businesses. However, such extensions can have a negative impact on their surroundings if they are poorly designed.
- 7.23 To ensure that extensions to existing buildings are designed to respect, reinforce and enhance local character, a policy could be developed setting out a number of criteria against which proposals would be assessed. Such a policy would have the benefit of meeting a number of local plan objectives including promoting good design and the protection and enhancement of the historic environment. High quality design is as important for the extension and alteration of existing buildings as it is for the design of new buildings and developments. Without a policy covering the extension and alteration of buildings, there could be a negative impact on the quality and character of an area.

Option 66 – Criteria based policy for alterations and extensions to existing buildings

This option would allow for the development of a policy setting out a range of criteria against which proposals for the extension or alteration of buildings requiring planning permission would be assessed. These criteria could include:

- The need for proposals to reflect or successfully contrast with the existing buildings form, use of materials and architectural detailing;
- The need for proposals to not unreasonably overlook, overshadow or visually dominate neighbouring properties;
- The need for proposals to respect the space between buildings where this contributes to the character of an area;
- The need for the retention of sufficient amenity space, bin storage, vehicular access, car and cycle parking;
- The need to ensure that proposals do not adversely affect listed buildings or their settings, the character and appearance of

conservation areas, trees or important wildlife features;

- The need for proposals including new or altered roof profiles to use materials are sympathetic to the existing building and surrounding area;
- The need to ensure that proposals for dormer windows are of a size and design that respect the character and proportions of the original building and surrounding context, do not dominate the existing roof profile and are sited away from prominent roof pitches, unless they are a specific feature of the area.

Such a policy would apply to both residential and non-residential proposals. The benefits of such an approach are that it will make it clear to developers what will need to be demonstrated as part of development proposals. Such a policy will help to ensure that proposals relating to existing buildings will not have a negative impact on the overall setting and character of the city, recognising the role that existing buildings have to play in creating high quality sustainable development. There could, however be a concern about the impact that these requirements may have on smaller schemes, in particular householder applications.

Questions

7.20 Is there a need for a policy addressing this issue?

7.21 Are there any points which have been missed and you feel should be added (perhaps even an entirely new option)?

7.22 Are there any other reasonable alternatives that should be considered at this stage?