

'We need an approach to the design and development of urban areas which:

- makes efficient use of the available land and buildings and reduces the demand for green field development;
- provides homes which are attractive and environmentally friendly;
- encourages well laid out urban areas with good quality buildings, well designed streets, and good quality public open spaces;
- allows people to get to work easily and to the services they need like local shops and health and leisure facilities; and
- makes good public transport viable and makes walking and cycling attractive options.'

Our Towns and Cities: the Future Delivering an Urban Renaissance paragraph 4.20

Purpose of the guide

Planning Policy Guidance Note 3: Housing (PPG3) sets out a radical new approach to planning for housing. It makes fundamental changes, both to the way we plan for new housing and the ambition we show for the places which we build. Priority is given to the development of urban brownfield sites before greenfield land. The old 'predict and provide' approach to housing need has been abandoned and a new policy of Plan, Monitor and Manage has been introduced. Underlining all this is the central concern that planning for housing should be about people, places and our environment.

PPG3 requires new development of the highest quality. It looks for the best use to be made of the land we have available and for new development to be built in a sustainable way, sensitive to the needs of people and the impact it has on the environment. It reflects the principle that where we live affects how we live, and the emphasis of both the urban and rural white papers that better planning and design offers the prospect of a higher quality of life and opportunity for all. In short, it demands the step-change in quality required to break the mould of mediocrity that has characterised so much new housing development.

The purpose of this guide is to help deliver that change. It does not set out new policy, rather it is a companion to PPG3 and should be read alongside it. It is a guide to better practice, not a pattern book. The guide aims to prompt greater attention to the principles of good design, not constrain thought. It complements *By Design*¹ and *Places, Streets and Movement*² by drawing together the principles of good urban design as they relate to the residential environment. Its focus is the urban design principles and approaches which underpin successful housing, not architectural treatment. Only by giving attention to these principles can the quality of housing layout and design be raised.



There is much to learn from the urban design principles which underpin places which have worked over time and which remain popular today. Jesmond, Newcastle

Who should read the guide

The guide is aimed at all those involved in the planning, design and development of new housing but, in particular, at local planning and highway authorities, housebuilders and their professional advisors. It is relevant to the whole spectrum of housing, but a major focus is housing within the density range of 30 to 50 dwellings per hectare. The greatest challenge to current practice lies in improving the quality of the 'anywhere, everywhere' residential environments that, typically, have been built at around 20 to 25 dwellings per hectare.



Modern apartments combining good design with innovation in construction. Murray Grove, Hackney

PPG3 focuses development onto previously-developed land in urban areas, but the guide will be equally relevant for those working to improve the quality of new housing elsewhere, including on the urban fringe. Too often development on the edge of our towns has not only exhibited some of the poorest standards of layout and design, but also has failed to support sustainable lifestyles.

The guide highlights many examples of best practice in a wide range of areas. The lessons to be drawn from them are not unique to the locations where they are found. They have an application to *all* new housing development.

This guide can help produce better design. But designing attractive, sustainable and inclusive places which can be enjoyed by all who use them, including elderly and disabled people, depends on the skills of designers. This requires a culture of investing in design. And it means designing for a particular place and the needs of future residents.

The hope is that the better practice highlighted will act as a spur for further innovation among those at the cutting edge of housing design and construction.

'We want our towns, cities and suburbs to be places for people – places that are designed, built and maintained on the principle that people come first. They should contribute to the quality of life and encourage healthy and sustainable lifestyles. They should be places in which we want to live, work, bring up our children, and spend our leisure time.'

Our Towns and Cities: the Future Delivering an Urban Renaissance paragraph 4.3



Urban apartments grouped around a shared green space. Here homes, landscape, routes for movement and parking are blended seamlessly together to create an attractive and distinctive place to live. Barons Court, Hammersmith and Fulham

The principles of urban design

The fundamental principles of urban design are described more fully in *By Design*. They involve expressing the main objectives of urban design through the various aspects of the built form.

The objectives of urban design can be summarised as follows:

Character

- A place with its own identity

Continuity and Enclosure

- A place where public and private spaces are clearly distinguished

Quality of the Public Realm

- A place with attractive and successful outdoor areas

Ease of Movement

- A place that is easy to get to and move through

Legibility

- A place that has a clear image and is easy to understand

Adaptability

- A place that can change easily

Diversity

- A place with variety and choice

The aspects of the built form are described as follows:

- Layout: Urban Structure – the framework of routes and spaces that connect locally and more widely, and the way developments, routes and open spaces relate to one another
- Layout: Urban Grain – the pattern of the arrangement of street blocks, plots and their buildings in a settlement
- Landscape – the character and appearance of land, including its shape, form, ecology, natural features, colours and elements, and the way these components combine
- Density and Mix – the amount of development on a given piece of land and the range of uses. Density influences the intensity of development, and, in combination with the mix of uses, can affect a place's vitality and viability.
- Scale: Height – scale is the size of a building in relation to its surroundings, or the size of parts of a building or its details, particularly in relation to the size of a person. Height determines the impact of development on views, vistas and skylines
- Scale: Massing – the combined effect of the arrangement, volume and shape of a building or group of buildings in relation to other buildings and spaces
- Appearance: Details – the craftsmanship, building techniques, decoration, styles and lighting of a building or structure
- Appearance: Materials – the texture, colour, pattern and durability of materials, and how they are used

'We are strongly committed to promoting earlier, greater and better-informed attention to design wherever new development takes place... We believe that better attention to design considerations from the outset will help to achieve high quality places in which people live, work or relax, not just in towns and cities but in villages and other rural areas as well'

Our Countryside: The Future A Fair Deal for Rural England paragraph 5.7.3

Making the change

PPG3 lays down a clear challenge both to housebuilders and to local authorities to take design seriously. Good design is not an extra that can be ignored, it is central to creating more attractive living environments and central to delivering sustainable developments through:

- making more efficient use of land;
- promoting better accessibility to local facilities and public transport;
- supporting crime prevention and community safety;
- creating more socially inclusive communities;
- promoting energy efficiency.

Many new housing developments fall short of what can be expected from the new approach set out in PPG3. There has been a growing gap between the exemplars of best practice and the standards achieved in the majority of cases.

Most recent housing developments have wasted land. PPG3 reported that more than half of new housing was developed at densities of less than 20 dwellings per hectare. As a consequence, many places fail to sustain local facilities and public transport.

All too frequently, inadequate thought has been given to safe, direct and convenient walking and cycling routes and insufficient attention has been paid to the relationship of spaces within and around the home. Too many housing developments have turned their backs on the wider community and have focused instead on narrowly defined markets and housing types. Communities are the poorer for it.

The responsibility for the unsustainable places that have resulted from poor design does not rest solely at the housebuilder's door. Underlying many of these shortcomings is a combination of local authority planning and highway design standards. These have helped give impetus to the palette of standard house types and layout forms which have been developed to meet these requirements. The result has been residential environments that meet these standards but lack any real quality or distinctive sense of place.



Typical suburban housing 1990's style with houses arranged around a road network designed for the car. Layouts such as this use land inefficiently and make viable public transport almost impossible

'New housing and residential environments should be well designed and should make a significant contribution to promoting urban renaissance and improving the quality of life'

PPG3: Housing, paragraph 1



The main route into a new neighbourhood. Everyone passes along it, yet the houses turn their backs onto it. The result is a soulless place where pedestrians feel insecure and where drivers are 'encouraged' to drive fast



Housing which met planning and highway design standards, but which wastes space and fails to create any sense of place or identity



Standard house types developed without proper regard for their context and setting. This scheme misses the opportunity to optimise housing capacity and undermines the character of the existing street

PPG3 provides the opportunity of a fresh start through:

- requiring local authorities to review critically the standards they apply to new development, particularly in relation to road layouts and car parking provision;
- encouraging more efficient use of land (housing development in the range of 30 to 50 dwellings to the hectare net) and higher densities where there is good accessibility to local facilities and public transport;
- requiring a better, and more appropriate mix of dwelling size, type and affordability in new development;
- looking to applicants for planning permission to demonstrate how they have taken into account the need for good urban design and making it clear that local planning authorities should reject poor design.

Delivering a fundamental change in the quality and layout of new residential environments requires investment in design and the appropriate design skills being brought to bear at the right time. Above all, it requires a better understanding of the design principles which contribute to the creation of successful residential environments. This is the purpose of this guide.



Efficient housing forms, such as the terrace, can be interpreted in very different ways and can meet a range of different housing requirements. What is common to both examples is the creation of a coherent urban form and a commitment to quality design. Lickey Hills, Birmingham (top) Millennium Village, Greenwich (below)

Preparing the guide

Unlike previous design guides which have relied heavily on a singular view of housing design, this guide takes a more reflective approach. This is based on the view that:

- the shortcomings in current practice are first and foremost to do with basic issues of layout rather than detailed issues of internal configuration, construction materials or architectural idiom;
- we can learn from the best of contemporary practice, but we can also learn a great deal from those residential environments which have stood the test of time, met the housing needs and expectations of many generations and which remain popular today;
- the residential environment must be seen in the round; approaches which have given too much emphasis to one issue (notably to accommodating traffic) have often failed because they departed from other tried and tested principles of urban design.

This guide is based on a detailed examination of both historic and contemporary practice, drawing from a study of residential environments from across the country. While a number of the developments included in the guide have won Housing Design Awards³ for the quality of their design, the guide deliberately draws from a wide range of different housing forms and contexts rather than looking solely at the very best of contemporary British housing design. The residential environments were selected to provide clear examples of practical approaches to implementing the basic principles of good urban design in a variety of different contexts, and to highlight both strong and weak points in their design. Indeed, an important objective in their selection was to include representation of ordinary, everyday housing as a counterfoil to some of the better known examples. The architecture illustrated in the guide will not, therefore, be to everyone's taste.

The focus has been the attributes of successful housing environments. These are the transferable lessons that can contribute to the creation of better residential environments in a wide variety of different contexts.

The attributes of successful housing

A literature review and analysis of historic and contemporary practice identified a number of attributes of successful housing. These were tested by a sounding board drawing on expertise from a wide range of disciplines working in a variety of backgrounds - including architects, highway engineers, landscape architects, planners, house

builders and police officers concerned with crime prevention. These attributes provided a basis for the analysis of selected residential environments and are reflected in the structure and content of the guide. The attributes are set out below, together with a signposting to the relevant Chapters of the guide.

		Chapters
Movement	A movement framework which is safe, direct and attractive to all users	2, 3 & 5
Mix	A rich mix of housing opportunities	4
Community	A sense of neighbourhood and community ownership	2 & 4
Structure	A coherent structure of buildings, spaces, landscape and routes for movement	3 & 5
Layout	Street layout and design which is appropriate to use and context	3 & 5
Place	Attractive and clearly defined public and private spaces	5, 6 & 7
Amenity	Pleasant gardens and private amenity space	6 & 7
Parking	Convenient but unobtrusive car parking	5 & 7
Safety	A safe and secure environment	All
Space	Well planned homes which provide space and functionality	6
Adaptability	Housing which is robust and adaptable to changing requirements	6
Maintenance	An environment which can be well maintained over the long-term	6 & 7
Sustainability	Housing designed to minimise resource consumption	All
Detail	Well considered detailing of buildings and spaces	7

Using the guide

The places which feature in this guide provide many important, and often straightforward, lessons that are relevant and applicable to new housing development across the country. But the examples used are not presented as either the Government's or CABE's preferred view of architectural treatment, construction practices or social mix. Nor should the places drawn upon in the guide be treated as model templates that can or should be copied in a simplistic manner. That would defeat the aim of this guide.

The guide has been written to prompt a holistic view of the design of residential environments. It is ordered to reflect the necessary layering of analysis from understanding the context for development through to concerns of detailed design. For ease of use, it brings together within individual chapters particular attributes of successful housing. Other attributes of fundamental importance - safety and security, robustness and adaptability, management and environmental performance - are over-arching concerns which permeate each level of analysis.

The guide is divided into six further chapters as follows:

■ Understanding the context (Chapter 2)
■ Creating a movement framework (Chapter 3)
■ Housing mix and neighbourhood (Chapter 4)
■ Housing layout and urban form (Chapter 5)
■ Space in and around the home (Chapter 6)
■ Thoroughness in design (Chapter 7)

Each chapter concludes with a short checklist setting out the key questions to be addressed if successful residential environments are to be secured. The guide is supported by an Appendix which provides detailed information and comparative data on the case study areas.

End notes:

1 *By Design. Urban design in the planning system: towards better practice*

2 *Places, Streets and Movement: A companion guide to Design Bulletin 32 Residential roads and footpaths*

3 The Housing Design Awards are sponsored by the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, the National House-Building Council, the Royal Institute of British Architects and the Royal Town Planning Institute. They are presented annually for projects or completed schemes of four or more dwellings which reflect the highest standards in housing design.