

# The South Gloucestershire Design Checklist

Supplementary Planning Document

Adopted August 2007



This checklist will help to achieve high standards of sustainable design that responds to its surroundings.

## Introduction

This checklist provides additional planning guidance on design matters covered by the South Gloucestershire Local Plan (Adopted January 2006), and was adopted by the Council as a Supplementary Planning Document (Adopted August 2007). It will be taken into account as a material consideration when the Council assesses and makes decisions on planning applications.

This checklist will help achieve good quality, sustainable design. It does this by asking 56 key questions, which are grouped under 12 topics. If applicants/agents follow the design process recommended by Circular 01/2006 of: assessment; involvement; evaluation; and design, certain key questions need only to be answered at the end of each stage. (see page 18 for details).

The key questions apply to all types of development throughout South Gloucestershire, although they will have a different significance depending on the type of development and the proposed site and, indeed, some may be irrelevant. The individual circumstances of an application and/or its site may require other questions not included in this checklist to be asked.

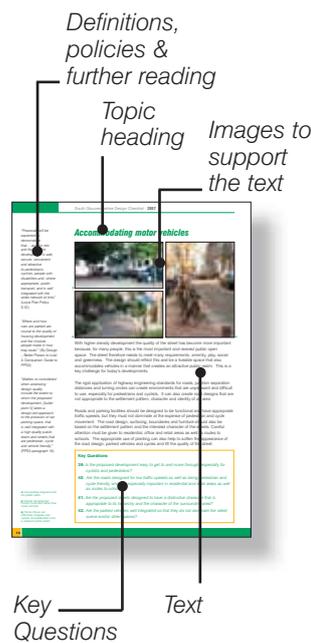
Each topic has a separate page, which highlights the pertinent issues, provides definitions and further reading as well as policies and text to support the issues (see diagram opposite). Topics are often interdependent on each other and therefore it is important to regard this document as a complete piece of work rather than 'cherry-pick' individual topics and questions.

## Using the checklist in design and access statements\*

It is a requirement of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 that most types of outline and detailed applications are accompanied by a Design and Access Statement. The requirements are set out in more detail in DCLG Circular 01/2006 dated 12th June 2006. **Not submitting a Design and Access Statement for such applications, will result in the application being invalid.**

Applicants and their Agents must take this Checklist into account when designing their schemes and, as a matter of good practice, their answers to the key questions should be included in the Design and Access Statement. Applicants that cannot positively answer all the questions relevant to the development type and site are unlikely to meet the high quality design expected by central government policy and local plan policy. If an applicant cannot answer a question positively (it may be irrelevant or may conflict with other questions), they must justify why in their Design and Access Statement.

Council Officers and Members will ask the key questions to help in the assessment of the design quality of an application. They will use this assessment to help decide whether the design aspects of an application will meet the policy requirements and if an application is good enough to approve.



Structure of the Topic pages

\* Guidance on how to read, write and use Design and Access Statements can be found at the CABE website: [www.cabe.org.uk](http://www.cabe.org.uk)

## The policy context

### National Policy

Planning Policy Statement 1 - Delivering Sustainable Development - makes it clear that "Good design ensures attractive, useable, durable and adaptable places and is a key element in achieving sustainable development. Good design is indivisible from good planning." (para 33)

### Local Plan Policy

The South Gloucestershire Local Plan (Adopted January 2006), (the Local Plan), includes a range of policies that relate to the design of the built and natural environments. In particular, Policy D1 sets out the Council's position on design:

*Development will only be permitted where good standards of site planning and design are achieved. In particular, proposals will be required to demonstrate that:*

- A.** *Siting, overall layout, density, form, scale, height, massing, detailing, colour and materials, are informed by, respect and enhance the character, distinctiveness and amenity of both the site and locality; and*
- B.** *Existing features of landscape, nature conservation, heritage or amenity value, including rights of way, are safeguarded and enhanced through incorporation into development; and*
- C.** *The landscape and urban design proposals for all external areas of the site form an integral part of the character of the design for the site and are of a scale and character which is appropriate to that of the development proposed and the surrounding landscape and townscape; and*
- D.** *Access into and through the development is safe, secure, convenient and attractive to pedestrians, cyclists, people with disabilities and, where relevant, public transport, and is well integrated into the wider network of links; and*
- E.** *Access into the development (where required) is safe for cars and other road vehicles; and*
- F.** *The overall layout and design takes account of personal safety; security and crime prevention; and*
- G.** *The design, density, orientation and location of buildings and associated landscape proposals seek to achieve energy conservation and the protection of environmental resources; and*
- H.** *Adequate provision is made for the storage and collection of waste and recyclable materials and, in larger development, recycling on site.*

*"Planning policies should promote high quality inclusive design in the layout of new developments and individual buildings in terms of function and impact, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development. Design which fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area should not be accepted" (PPS1 para 13 key principle iv)*

*"In planning for the achievement of high quality and inclusive design, planning authorities should have regard to good practice set out in By Design - Urban design in the planning system: towards better practice; By Design - better places to live; Safer Places - the Planning System and Crime Prevention; and Planning and Access for Disabled People: A Good Practice Guide." (PPS1 para 37)*

"...include a proper assessment of the character of the built and natural environment of the site and its context and the impact upon it of the proposed development."  
(Local Plan para. 3.8)

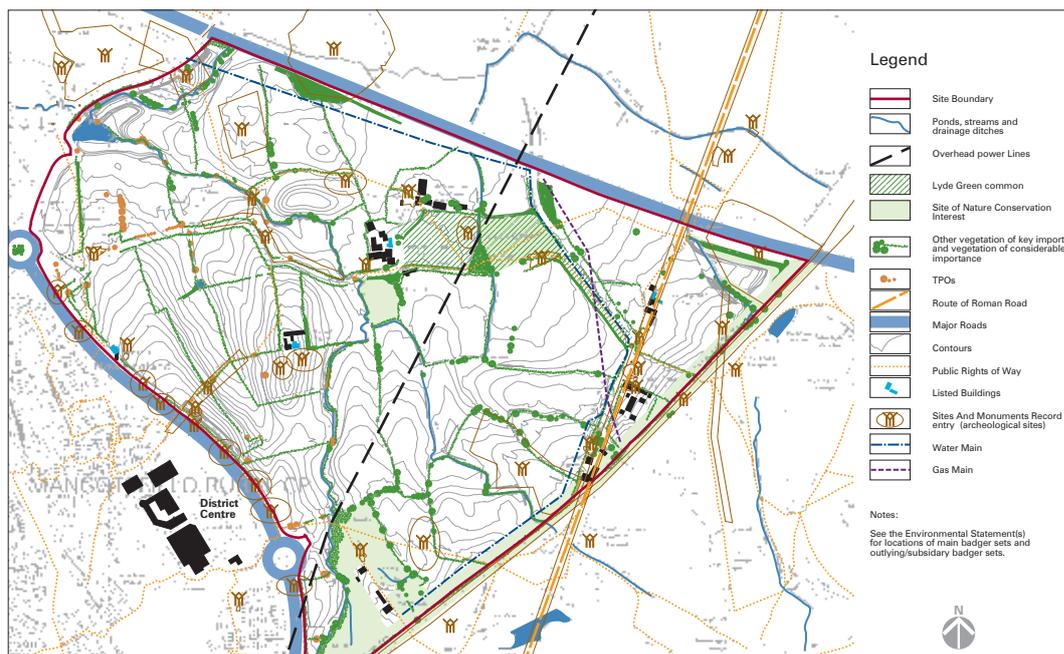
"In order to achieve good design, the Council will, where appropriate, seek to work with developers in the preparation of site specific planning guidance i.e. concept statements and/or development briefs and masterplans ... These will be subject to public participation and consultation." (Local Plan para 3.10)

"The outcomes from planning affect everyone, and everyone must therefore have the opportunity to play a role in delivering effective and inclusive planning. Community involvement is vitally important to planning and the achievement of sustainable development."  
(PPS1 para 40)

<sup>1</sup>The Council's emerging Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) will set out the requirements for applicants to consult local communities prior to submitting applications of a certain size and/or type.

a: Constraints Plan for Emersons Green East Development Brief

## Beginning the design process



Few development sites come as flat, empty blocks of land. Some are rich in archaeology or wildlife, or contain important landscape or boundary features. In others buildings are listed, or locally listed, or within a conservation area or the AONB. The site may be prone to flooding or a previous use may have contaminated the land. Preservation orders may apply to some trees, or there may be other natural features and/or changes in level that contribute to the local character and biodiversity. There may also be attractive views out as well as important views to or across the site.

Consulting the local community early in the design process can help to make sure a development reflects the community needs as well as encouraging local people to get involved. The Council encourages all applicants to consult the local community prior to submitting an application as this can speed up the development control process. For large scale development, the preparation of urban design guidance can be an effective means to engage the local community and communicate a vision<sup>1</sup>.

Appraising the site and its surroundings, and consulting the local community are essential first steps in the design process. The information collected needs to be evaluated and any conflicts resolved, which can be summarised in a Constraints and Opportunities Plan, and provide all stakeholders with an understanding of the site and the surroundings as well as firm foundation from which a design can emerge.

### Key Questions

1. Has the site and its context been appraised, identifying all the factors that contribute to its character and locality, as well as other planned development?
2. Does the development require an Environmental Impact Assessment
3. For large scale development, has the local community been consulted and participated in the design process as set out with the Council's SCI?
4. Has a constraints and opportunities plan been produced?
5. Has a conceptual design been prepared, which has taken account of any community consultation and has clearly emerged from the appraisal of the site?

## The natural and cultural environment



South Gloucestershire contains a rich and diverse array of natural and historic landscapes, wildlife, geology and archaeological sites.

Given the increasing pressures on landscapes and biodiversity arising from all sizes of development, it is critically important that landscape, archaeology and wildlife issues are considered at the earliest stage in the design process. Large-scale developments may affect archaeological remains, landscape features, protected species or areas of scarce or declining types of habitats. Even smaller development such as farm buildings can threaten valuable roost or nest sites for local wildlife such as bats or birds, or important archaeological remains. It is therefore essential that any issues relating to landscape, cultural heritage and biodiversity are identified when initially appraising development sites.

Where a site or its surroundings is found to have environmental value, adverse impacts on such value should be designed out. Where this is not possible mitigation or compensation may be acceptable depending on the level and severity of impact of the development.

### Key Questions

6. Have appropriate investigations been undertaken to establish whether the site and its surroundings are of archaeological value and/or have, or potentially have, value for wildlife?
7. Has a survey been undertaken of any archaeology, vegetation and trees on or adjacent to the site?
8. Have steps been taken to ensure the conservation and enhancement of any archaeology, wildlife and habitats found on site, and are they incorporated into the proposals?
9. Have steps been taken to ensure that significant vegetation and trees are retained and become an asset within the new development?
10. Is the development within the Forest of Avon area and if so, how will it contribute to the objectives of the forest?

Biodiversity describes the wealth and variety, or biological diversity of all life on this Earth. It includes all plants, animals, as well as habitats, soils and rocks in which they occur. It applies to all environments from urban to coastal, from woods to open countryside, whether locally, nationally or internationally.

*"Development which would directly or indirectly have an adverse effect on national or internationally protected species of flora and fauna, or species or habitats listed in a national, regional or local Biodiversity Action Plans, will not be permitted unless any damaging effects are capable of being avoided, overcome or offset by mitigation measures"*  
(Local Plan Policy L9)

*"...new development will be permitted only where: (a) those attributes of landscape which make a significant contribution to the character of the landscape are conserved and where possible enhanced."*  
(Local Plan Policy L1)

The Council has published a number of documents on Biodiversity, landscape and the historic environment which are listed in the Useful References at the end of this document.

*"Proposals for residential development... will be permitted, provided that: A. Development would not have an unacceptable environmental and transportation effects, and would not significantly prejudice residential amenity; and B. The maximum density compatible with the site, its location, its accessibility and its surroundings is achieved. The expectation is that all developments will achieve a minimum density of 30 dwellings per hectare and that higher densities will be achieved where local circumstances permit..."*  
(Local Plan Policy H2)

*"...the Government's policy is to ensure that housing is developed in suitable locations which offer a range of community facilities and good access to jobs, key services and infrastructure."*  
(PPS3 para 36)

*"Within the existing urban areas and settlements as defined on the proposals map, development will not be permitted where it would affect the contribution that an open area makes to the quality, character, amenity and distinctiveness of the locality."*  
(Local Plan Policy L5)

<sup>2</sup> Local centres are identified on pages 257 and 258 of the Local Plan.

<sup>3</sup> Major town centres and minor town centres identified on pages 257 and 258 of the Local Plan.

## An appropriate use, type and amount of development



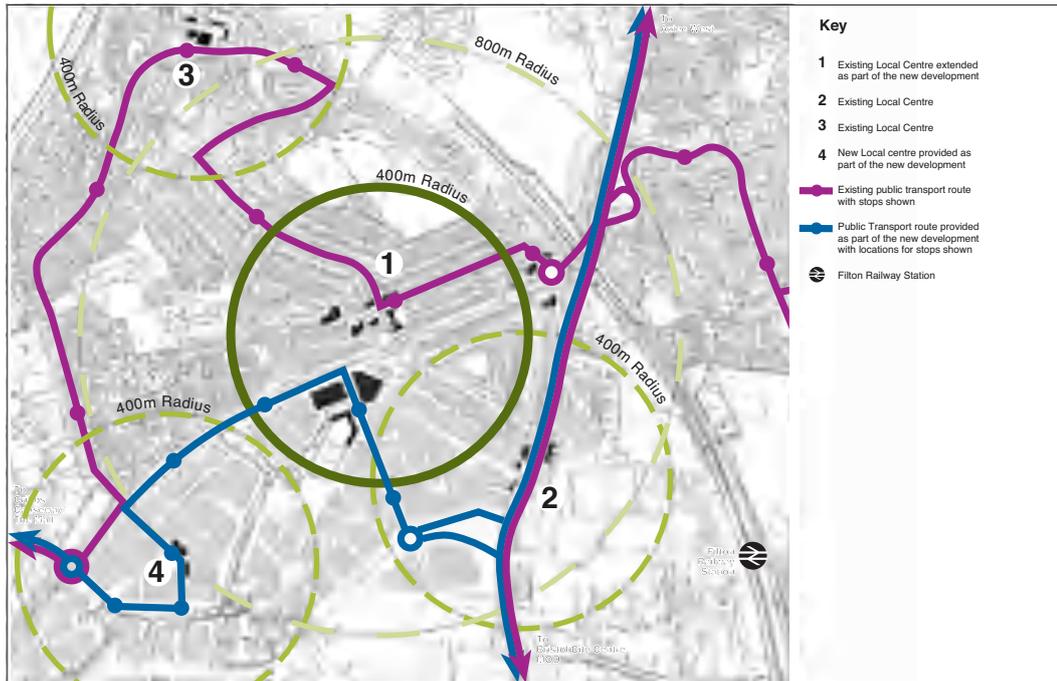
Sustainable communities cater for children, teenagers, adults, the elderly as well as people with disabilities, who require a mix of house types and tenures including affordable housing. They also need safe and easy access to public transport, services, employment and community facilities.

Building at high residential densities is a means to an end: to allow people to live within easy and safe walking and cycling distance of a range of work, service, shopping, education, leisure (including play and green space) and public transport routes with a frequent service to a variety of destinations. People do not, therefore, need to rely on the car as a mode of transport which can reduce congestion and carbon emissions. Conversely, providing development in a location that is not accessible to services and amenities will not offer a credible alternative to the car with the effect of increasing congestion and carbon emissions.

Very early on in the design process, an analysis should be undertaken of the proximity of the site to workplaces, services, education, leisure, play, green spaces and public transport within a reasonable walking distance. As a rule of thumb, a walking distance of 400 metres is used for local centres<sup>2</sup> and 800 metres is used for major and minor town centres<sup>3</sup>, (400m / 800m equates to about 5 minute / 10 minute walk). It is also important to appraise the quality of the route; steep gradients, crossing major roads and poor environments at day or night can discourage people from walking and cycling.

From the analysis of the site's proximity to services and amenities and depending on the environmental constraints, the existing provision of green infrastructure and play areas, the following net densities may be appropriate:

- within 400 metres of major town centres and minor town centres - up to 50 – 75 dwellings per hectare;
- within 800 metres of major town centres and minor town centres - up to 40 – 60 dwellings per hectare;
- within 400 metres of local centres - up to 30 – 50 dwellings per hectare;
- over 400 metres / 800 metres from a centre may have potential to be developed – up to 30 – 40 dwellings per hectare.



*“Key characteristics of a mixed community are a variety of housing, particularly in terms of tenure and price and a mix of different households such as families with children, single person households and older people.” (PPS3 para 20)*

*“Proposals for residential development...will be permitted provided that: provision for education, leisure, recreation and other community facilities within the vicinity is adequate to meets the needs arising from the proposals.” (Local Plan Policy H2D).*

The objective to maximise the efficiency and density of development **does not override** other policy requirements such as the protection and enhancement of the environment. Where there are environmental constraints or an area has a distinctive local character, compliance with adopted planning policy may only be achieved with lower densities. On the other hand, there may be sites that are very well related to the necessary services and amenities where, subject to compatibility with the character of the locality, greater densities may be achieved.

*“As well as respecting context and local character, new development should of itself be of good quality. Attention should be paid to...mixing activities and tenures” (Local Plan para 3.6).*

New development may be of sufficient size to provide its own neighbourhood centre(s) and amenities and, where opportunities exist, extend existing centres or enhance existing amenities and transport services.

### Key Questions

11. *Is the use and amount of development appropriate to the site’s accessibility to jobs, shops, local services, community facilities and the frequency of public transport service?*
12. *Is the proposed development of sufficient size to extend existing centres, public transport service and/or provide its own local services/public transport service (e.g. school, jobs, library, post office etc. that could be designed as dual use).*
13. *Where residential development is proposed does the development offer a mix of residential types and tenures that reflect the needs of the locality, including affordable housing, (which is indistinguishable from the general housing)?*
14. *Does the proposal maximise development potential whilst respecting and enhancing the environment, the physical characteristics of the site, its features and surroundings without prejudice to the existing uses or potential development of adjacent sites and adjoining amenities?*

**b:** *Densities to be maximised near centres and public transport routes at Emersons Green*

**c:** *Analysis of existing Centres and public transport routes together with proposals for a major new development at Northfield*

## Open space in new development

*"Matters to consider when assessing design quality include the extent to which the proposed development: [bullet point 2] provides or enables good access to, community and green and open amenity and recreational space (including play space) as well as private outdoor space such as residential gardens, patios and balconies."* (PPS3 paragraph 16)

*"Where local provision for formal open space and children's playspace and informed open space is inadequate to meet the projected needs arising from the future occupiers of proposals for new residential development, the Council will negotiate with developers to secure provision to meet these needs, together with provision for subsequent maintenance. This may include provision on site by the developer and/or contributions to provisions or enhancements of existing easily accessible provision within the vicinity."* (Local Plan Policy LC8)



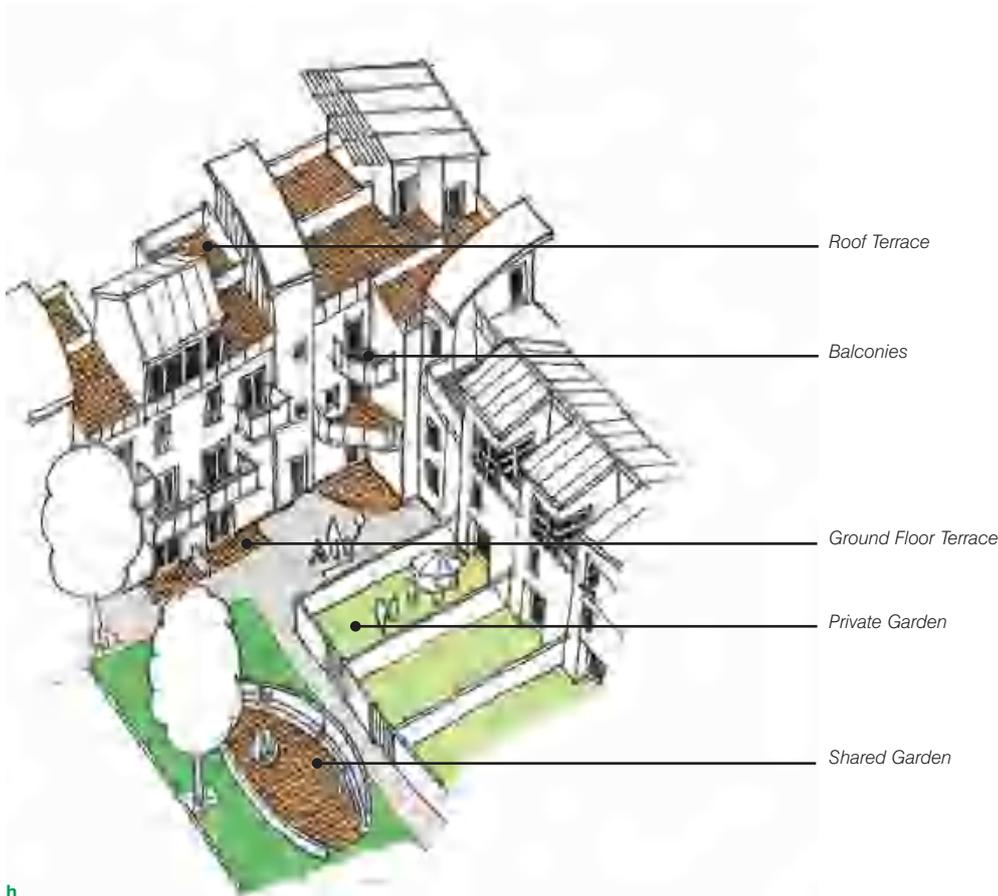
The value of open space becomes increasingly important in high density development. Yet, all too often open space is compromised or marginalised as development becomes more compact. This topic focuses on private/shared open spaces as well as formal and informal public open spaces, but it is important to emphasise the close relationship to other topics in this checklist: an attractive realm (page 13) accommodating motor vehicles (page 14) and landscape design (page 15).

Attractive places offer private/shared amenity space for occupiers (private gardens, communal gardens, balconies, roof terraces etc), as well as a variety of hard and soft public spaces (streets, play areas, civic squares, walkways, linear parks, enclosed parks etc.), all of which combine to form the 'green infrastructure' of a settlement. The design of play areas needs to be carefully considered so that they form part of an integral landscape design, which promotes a range of playful and challenging open space for people of all ages and abilities.

In some circumstances a site may make a valuable contribution to the green infrastructure, restricting its development potential, while in other locations it may be more appropriate for new development to make a contribution to the enhancement of existing facilities off site, or indeed a combination of the two approaches.

Developers should therefore appraise the open spaces within walking distance of the proposal site in the context of the projected increase in population that will result from their own development, and identify opportunities to connect into such open space(s), and address/make good any shortfall in the locality.

New development needs to provide a variety of open space (both private and public), within an easy and safe walking distance. As a rule of thumb, private/shared open spaces should be immediately accessible, local play spaces (LEAP) within 240 metres, neighbourhood parks (NEAP) within 600 metres, and district/town open spaces (formal squares, playing fields etc) should be within 800 metres of dwellings.



The South Gloucestershire Play Policy (December 2006), sets out the Councils understanding of play and confirms its commitments for play, hanging-out and informal recreation.

**h**

Depending on the size and amount of development as well as the intended users, the open space may range from: private gardens to balconies; children’s play areas to formal sports pitches, informal and formal open spaces. In some cases open space will be required to protect or create environmental assets such as sites or features of nature conservation, historic or landscape importance. Depending on the environmental sensitivity, such areas may or may not be appropriate for use for recreational purposes. These issues must be examined at the beginning of the design process as the appropriate density for a site cannot be determined until this analysis is completed. Whatever the size of development it will be necessary to take opportunities to provide attractive and safe routes for pedestrians and cyclists within the green infrastructure of a settlement, which connect to existing routes in the wider green infrastructure.

**Key Questions**

- 15.** *Has an appropriate analysis been undertaken of the environmental constraints and opportunities on the site and in the locality, and have the findings informed the development of green infrastructure proposals for the site?*
- 16.** *Does the development provide private open space (such as gardens, balconies roof terraces), and/or communal open space of sufficient size to meet the needs of the future community, which is also easily and safely accessible?*
- 17.** *Does the development provide and identify accessible locations for a wide range of challenging and imaginative open spaces (including play space), that meet the needs of the future and existing community and are also easily and safely accessible?*
- 18.** *Where opportunities exist, does the development provide safe routes for pedestrians and cyclists that connect into the wider green infrastructure, and are these appropriately combined with routes to other services and amenities?*

**d:** *Communal garden provided within a perimeter block*

**e:** *Local play area provided within a perimeter block*

**f:** *Formal Square*

**g:** *Neighbourhood park forming part of the landscape of an area*

**h:** *Illustration of different types of private open space within a perimeter block.*

*"Proposals will be required to demonstrate that:...The design, density, orientation and location of buildings and associated landscape proposals incorporate measures to achieve energy conservation and the protection of environmental resources;..."*  
(Local Plan Policy D1G)

*"Developers, local authorities, regional agencies and others must ensure that their strategies, plans and programmes achieve best practice in sustainable construction by: [bullet point 2] Requiring that all new and refurbished buildings achieve the requirements of BREEAM and Eco-homes, very good standard, or at least Level 3 above minimum building standards in the emerging 'Code for Sustainable Homes', in order to minimise lifetime resource use, energy consumption, water use and waste production."* (draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West of England Policy G)

*"Larger scale developments will be expected to provide, as a minimum, sufficient on site renewable energy to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from the energy use by users of the buildings constructed on site by 10%"*  
(draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West of England policy RE5)

Note: For large scale development, that will be built over many years, standards will be set to increase over the time of its planned implementation.

## Minimising the use of energy and resources



With a growing concern about climate change, building in a manner to minimise the use of energy and natural resources is a necessity.

At the earliest stages of the design process applicants should consider a variety of strategies and technologies to reduce the amount of energy and resources a development consumes. They vary from the scale of the settlement, neighbourhood, and the street, and include: the re-use and conversion of existing buildings, walls and structures; the retention of rainwater on site, either for re-use or absorption into the ground; the orientation and location of buildings and trees to maximise solar gains and/or improve shelter from the elements; the appropriate use of natural slopes and landscape/tree planting schemes; the provision for the storage and collection of waste and recyclable materials; and the inclusion of on site energy production such as photo-voltaic cells and wind turbines. The design of the building(s) can also help to minimise the consumption of energy and natural resources by: passive solar gains; natural ventilation; natural lighting; and grey water recycling.

### Key Questions

- 19.** *Is there an implementable energy strategy that: minimises energy demand for the site through layout, building orientation, landscaping, natural ventilation and passive solar design; calculates the residual energy demand for the site; and maximises the amount of residual demand which can be provided through on site generated renewable energy?*
- 20.** *Has provision been made for managing flood risk and water resources (e.g. sustainable drainage, harvesting rainwater and grey water recycling schemes)?*
- 21.** *Is there an implementable waste strategy that: re-uses existing buildings, infrastructure and materials (where appropriate), minimising generation of onsite waste during the construction and lifetime of the development; and integrates bin storage, recycling and composting facilities into the development?*
- 22.** *Are the proposals a major development and, if so, does it have on-site energy production from renewable sources, that will reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from energy use by users of the buildings?<sup>4</sup>*
- 23.** *Will the development be assessed and achieve the highest standards<sup>4</sup> of resource and energy efficiency as well as reductions in carbon emissions?*

<sup>4</sup> The standards will be set in the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy for the South-West of England. Until such time the RSS is adopted, the minimum standards will be: 10% for on-site energy production from renewable sources; and BREEAM 'very good' / Level 3 of the Code for Sustainable Homes.

## Places with character and identity



The Marshfield Plateau landscape character area - sketch map



The Frenchay Conservation Area

There are wide and diverse varieties of landscapes and built environments throughout South Gloucestershire. Some are designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty or Conservation Areas, but many of are not and in some areas the environment is poor. Nevertheless, each have their own distinct character and identity, which must be appraised in the early stages of the design process.

A development that reflects and improves the characteristics and history of the location and surroundings can help to foster a sense of identity and ownership. The development does not have to copy the style of the surrounding architecture, but will often benefit from responding to the settlement pattern, architectural characteristics and materials of the surrounding buildings, the landscape and natural features, as well as the aspect of the site and/or particular views. New development is expected to conserve and enhance those characteristics of the landscape that define its character, distinctiveness, amenity and quality. This will help to avoid inappropriate 'anywhere' development that has sometimes eroded the distinctive character and identity of South Gloucestershire in recent decades and also takes opportunities to improve the character and quality of an area.

### Key Questions

24. Are the proposals a compatible and quality response to landscape/townscape character, (which should have been identified at appraisal stage and may also be in the Landscape Character Assessment, Conservation Area Character Appraisal and any Village Design Statement), including the scale of the buildings, streets, landscape and roofscape?
25. Is the development, (including the buildings, streets, roofscape, walls, and open spaces), informed and shaped by the characteristics, identity, history, constraints and opportunities of the site?
26. Have elements contributing to the character and distinctiveness of the location, including landscape, cultural and bio-diversity, been protected and/or enhanced?
27. Is there a coherent response to settlement pattern, views, vistas and topography of the site and its surroundings?

*"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."*  
(PPS1 para 34)

*"Proposals will be required to demonstrate that:... siting, overall layout, density, form scale, height, massing, detailing, colour and materials are informed by, respect and enhance the character, distinctiveness and amenity of both the site and the locality;..."*  
(Local Plan Policy D1A)

*"New development will only be permitted where: (a) Those attributes which make a significant contribution to the character of the landscape are conserved and where possible enhanced..."*  
(Local Plan Policy L1)

The Council's Landscape Character Assessment, provides an assessment of the landscape character and identifies key characteristics of each area throughout South Gloucestershire.

Conservation Area Character Appraisals are available for most of the Conservation Areas within the South Gloucester Area. [www.southglos.gov.uk/conservation\\_areas](http://www.southglos.gov.uk/conservation_areas)

A permeable environment is “easy to get to and move through.” (By Design. Urban Design in the Planning System: Towards a better Practice p. 38)

A legible environment is “a place that has a clear image and is easy to understand.” (By Design. Urban Design in the Planning System: Towards a better Practice p.28)

Continuity and enclosure provides “a place where public and private spaces are clearly distinguished.” (By Design. Urban Design in the Planning System: Towards a better Practice p.21)

## Permeability, legibility and enclosure



i



j



k

Streets, buildings and open spaces need to be carefully arranged to connect with each other, as well as existing patterns of streets and open spaces. This will help to ensure a development responds positively to the character of an area, make it easy to get to and move through and allow services and public transport to be accessible to all.

Finding your way around a place (its legibility), can be improved by retaining or creating landmarks, focal points, views, clear pedestrian and cycle routes, gateways to particular areas, lighting, public art and signs. Corner buildings and features are also useful in giving direction and identity. Avenue trees, ponds, hedgerows and other landscape features can also contribute to legibility.

Streets and public spaces work well if the public and private areas are clearly defined and are enclosed appropriately. This can be achieved by arranging buildings, landscape and boundary treatments, of an appropriate height: width ratio, to follow a continuous line and create active edges. Contrasting enclosure with openness can also be effective to exploit views and vistas as well as respecting the character of the area. Enclosure must therefore be appropriate and, where necessary, varied.

### Key Questions

28. Will the proposed layout create or contribute to a network of connected streets and open spaces that also, where opportunities exist, connect to existing patterns of streets and open spaces?
29. Is there a clear hierarchy of streets and open spaces, each with a clear 'desired character' (the desired character should inform the road design and not the other way around), which are designed to have appropriate traffic speeds?
30. Will it be easy to direct someone to where 'you' live/work by landmarks, focal points, gateways, public art or views?
31. Do the proposals clearly define public space from private, work or play spaces, especially the boundary treatments?
32. Are the streets and/or public spaces appropriately enclosed by buildings, landscape or boundary treatments that are an appropriate height to the width of the street/public space, (or are there open views and vistas that can be exploited or does the existing character of the area inform the proposals)?
33. Where appropriate, are the streets and public spaces enclosed and well defined by active edges such as front doors, windows, shopfronts etc. that are interesting and varied, as well as respecting each other?

i: Bath Crescents and Circus are prime examples of a places that are permeable, legible and have a positive enclosure.

j: Front doors help to create active edges and their distinctiveness can create a landmark, making a space more legible.

k: Buildings and boundary treatments positively enclose the space.

## An attractive public realm



The spaces around buildings are as important as the buildings themselves. A variety of paved and green public spaces should be planned for a particular use and must be well designed for diverse experiences and users of all ages and abilities. The quality of the public realm is also closely linked to permeability, legibility and enclosure (see page12), as this contributes to vibrancy, overlooking and self policing. In certain circumstances it may also be necessary to consider how the public spaces can enhance or contribute to the biodiversity and landscape character of an area.

Careful attention must be given to the design of the home-zones, streets and civic spaces as they make a valuable contribution to the quality of a place. This requires thinking about views and vistas, play opportunities, ground surfaces, kerbs, changes of level, street lighting, utility boxes, public art, public seating, street furniture (including litter bins and dog bins), landscape features and trees, to create uncluttered areas.

The future maintenance of streets and public as well as private open spaces must also be considered. Those areas that are to be adopted by the Council need to be identified. Areas that are to remain private need a long term management and maintenance plan to be in place from the start.

### Key Questions

34. Do the areas of open space (squares, parks, formal/informal spaces and play areas etc.), together with the streets, form a public realm that is integral to the development and respects and enhances its surroundings?
35. Do the proposals ensure all public open space(s) is: useable; not left over space; has clear ownership; and has an appropriate boundary treatment?
36. Have the ground surfaces, kerbs, changes of level, lighting, public art, landscape, public seating and street furniture, together with utility boxes, cables, signage and poles, been designed into the street and/or public space to avoid clutter and do they respect and enhance the character of the area?
37. Have the areas that are to be adopted by the Council been identified and are they easily maintained (where necessary contributions will be sought), and have areas that will not be adopted been identified and a long term management and maintenance plan submitted as part of the application?
38. Where a development makes a contribution to public art, do the proposals form an integral part of the public realm?

*"The public realm is made up of those parts of a village town or city that are available, without special charge, for use by everyone" (By Design. Urban Design in the Planning System: Towards a better Practice p.24)*

*"Proposals will be required to demonstrate that...The landscape and urban design proposals for all external areas of the site form an integral part of the character of the design for the site and are of a scale and character which is appropriate to that of the development proposed and the surrounding landscape and townscape"*  
(Local Plan Policy D1C)

*"In determining applications for major new development the Council will seek the contribution of an agreed percentage of the total development costs for the provision or commissioning of publicly accessible art, craft and design work."*  
(Local Plan Policy LC13)

*"Left over space is wasted space which in time is likely to become a nuisance."*  
(By design – Better Places to Live. A Companion Guide to PPG3. Page 52)

**i:** Street furniture integrated into the streetscene

**m:** Landscape is an essential part of the public realm

**n:** Public art must form part of the public realm

"Proposals will be required to demonstrate that... access into and through the development is safe, secure, convenient and attractive to pedestrians, cyclists, people with disabilities and, where relevant, public transport, and is well integrated with the wider network of links" (Local Plan Policy D1D)

"Where and how cars are parked are crucial to the quality of housing development and the choices people make in how they travel." (By Design – Better Places to Live/ A Companion Guide to PPG3)

"Matters to considered when assessing design quality include the extent to which the proposed development: [bullet point 5] takes a design-led approach to the provision of car parking space, that is well integrated with a high quality public realm and streets that are pedestrian, cycle and vehicle friendly." (PPS3 paragraph 16)

## Accommodating motor vehicles



With higher density development the quality of the street has become more important because, for many people, this is the most important and nearest public open space. The street therefore needs to meet many requirements: amenity, play, social and greenness. The design should reflect this and be a liveable space, which also accommodates vehicles in a manner that creates an attractive public realm and reinforces the local character and distinctiveness. This is a key challenge for today's developments.

The rigid application of highway engineering standards for roads, junction separation distances and turning circles can create environments that are unpleasant and difficult to use, especially for pedestrians and cyclists. It can also create road designs that are not appropriate to the settlement pattern, character and identity of an area.

Roads and parking facilities should be designed to be functional and have appropriate traffic speeds, but they must not dominate at the expense of pedestrian and cycle movement. The road design, surfacing, boundaries and furniture should also be based on the settlement pattern and the intended character of the streets. Careful attention must be given to residential, office and retail areas as well as routes to schools. The appropriate use of planting can also help to soften the appearance of the road design, parked vehicles and cycles and lift the quality of the street.

### Key Questions

39. Is the proposed development easy to get to and move through, especially for cyclists and pedestrians?
40. Are the roads designed for low traffic speeds as well as being pedestrian and cycle friendly, which is especially important in residential and retail areas as well as routes to schools?
41. Are the proposed streets designed to have a distinctive character that is appropriate to its hierarchy and the character of the surrounding area?
42. Are the parked vehicles well integrated so that they do not dominate the street scene and/or other spaces?

**o:** Car parking integrated into the public realm

**p:** Streets designed for human movement rather than motor vehicles

**q:** Home Zones can effectively integrate cars, cyclists and pedestrians into a coherent public realm.

## Landscape design



Good quality landscape design makes a significant contribution to the quality of life. It is therefore key to the success of all scales of development, from house extensions or stables to large new communities or employment areas, and in all contexts from rural countryside to densely urban.

The design of all external areas, whether public or private should be considered from the outset, and as an integral part of the development proposals throughout the site. Landscape is not something that just fills the gaps at the end of the design process, nor is it just what happens around the edge of the site.

Landscape design proposals should respond to the character, biodiversity and heritage of the site and its surroundings, the nature of the proposed development and the needs of the community. They must also take account of and respond to an assessment of views and visibility or visual intrusion. Designs for the external areas must include not just planting but also any level changes, kerbing, ground modelling, paving, walls, boundary treatments, 'furniture' such as lighting columns, seats, bollards & cycle stands. Services such as drains, water and cables must be located to accommodate the proposed planting.

Landscape requires future management and maintenance. Layouts must facilitate access for maintenance. Materials must not only be appropriate to the locality, but also selected for durability, and planting must be selected to take account of future maintenance. Appropriate financial contributions for future maintenance may be required where landscaped areas are to be adopted by the Council.

### Key Questions

43. Do the landscape proposals fit with and enhance the character of the site and its setting, including pattern, layout, materials, and choice of species?
44. Do the landscape proposals mitigate visual impact, and are they in scale with the proposed development?
45. Do the landscape proposals maximise opportunities for biodiversity, sustainable drainage, and reinforce the energy efficiency of buildings?
46. Have the proposals for planting, building layout and service runs been checked against each other to ensure they do not conflict?
47. Are the materials, plants and seeds from sustainable sources?

*"in order that the character, distinctiveness, quality and amenity of the landscapes of South Gloucestershire are conserved and enhanced, new development will only be permitted where (b) those features in or of the landscape which make a significant contribution to the character or distinctiveness of the locality are retained, protected and managed in a manner that ensures their long term viability..."*  
(Local Plan Policy L1)

*"Development that would harm the natural beauty of the Cotswolds AONB will not be permitted. Where development is to proceed measures will be required to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the landscape"*  
(Local Plan Policy L2)

*"Development will only be permitted where good standards of site planning and design are achieved, In particular, proposals will be required to demonstrate that: (c) the landscape and urban design proposals for all external areas of the site form an integral part of the design for the site and are of a scale and character which is appropriate to that of the development proposed and the surrounding landscape and townscape..."*  
(Local Plan Policy D1)

*“Designing out crime and designing in community safety should be central to the planning and delivery of new development... The prevention of crime and the enhancement of community safety are matters that a local planning authority should consider when exercising its functions under the Town and Country Planning legislation.”*  
(Safer Places – The Planning System and Crime Prevention. page 7)



*Overlooking of the street can help to discourage crime*

*“Proposals will be required to demonstrate that: the overall layout and design takes account of personal safety, security and crime prevention...”*  
(Local Plan Policy D1F)

Public spaces, buildings and private spaces can be designed to feel more secure without resorting to visually intrusive measures such as barbed wire, shutters or bollards. Key to creating safe environments is ensuring activity and use as well as people overlooking spaces and thoroughfares throughout the day and night. Places that have a mix of uses, type and tenure of buildings, an attractive public realm and a distinct character, together with being permeable, legible and appropriately enclosed tend to foster a safe and secure community.

Security of the building and private spaces must also be considered. Boundary treatments, gates, windows, doors and garage doors together with their associated locks need to be carefully specified to effectively secure an area and/or building.

Development that commits to achieving Secure by Design accreditation will be considered to answer Questions 48, 49, 50 and 51 positively.

### Key Questions

- 48.** *Does the overall design and juxtaposition of buildings and spaces ensure that there are no potential entrapment spots, including hiding spaces and secluded areas, where crime and antisocial behaviour could occur?*
- 49.** *Are the external spaces and thoroughfares appropriately lit, overlooked by the public rooms of buildings (e.g. living rooms, café seating areas), and enclosed by buildings with frequent entrances?*
- 50.** *Are the storage spaces, such as car and cycle parking, overlooked and where appropriate within secure areas?*
- 51.** *Does the specification of the boundary treatments, windows, doors and garage doors, together with their associated locks, secure an area and/or building in a manner that respects and enhances the character of an area?*

## Good quality building design



Good building design is less to do with a particular style and more to do with the successful co-ordination of proportions, materials, colour and detail and how these relate to the character and identity of the surroundings as well as the constraints and opportunities of the site. The building also needs to be functional and work well for its intended users, including good space standards, natural light, energy efficiency and sound insulation.

Details must be considered as an integral part of the building and not an add-on. Particular care must be given to profiles, corners, roof lines, how the building meets the ground and fits into the landscape, together with the location and detail of building services (such as: plant rooms; lift over-runs; extract fans; TV aerials; satellite dishes; and meter cupboards), as these will have a significant effect on the overall impression of the building.

Access to and around buildings must be easy for all, and buildings themselves must be designed to allow future adaptation. This is particularly important for residential development, as residents can alter their homes to cope with changing lifestyles whilst remaining within a community. The potential to convert the loft space or extend the property to the back or side is valuable. Houses and apartments can be designed without internal load-bearing walls, which allows partitions to be added or removed to suit the owner's needs. Also rooms need to be large enough to allow them to be used in a variety of ways, for example, as a work space, study, bedroom or playroom. Residential development that commits to achieving Lifetime Homes accreditation will be considered to answer question 55 and 56 positively<sup>5</sup>.

*"As well as respecting the context and local character, new development should of itself be of good quality. Attention should be paid to... producing buildings that are durable and adaptable."*  
(Local Plan para 3.6)

*"Local planning authorities should not attempt to impose architectural styles or particular tastes and they should not stifle innovation, originality or initiative through unsubstantiated requirements to conform to certain development forms or styles. It is, however, proper to seek to promote or reinforce local distinctiveness..."*  
(PPS1 para 38)

### Key Questions

52. *Do the building(s) exhibit architectural quality in a manner that respects or enhances the character of the area, especially: at corners; at roof lines; where the building meets the ground; and the location and detailing of services?*
53. *Will the building or space work well for its intended user and take full advantage of the opportunities of the site (e.g. views)?*
54. *Have materials been selected and detailed to respect and enhance the local character and be of good quality in themselves?*
55. *Has the building(s) been designed so that all people can easily access it (eg the entrance obvious), and easily move within it?*
56. *Has the building(s) been designed to allow easy adaptation, conversion or extension?*

<sup>5</sup> Lifetime Homes Standard 4 requires covered main entrance to every dwelling. which may put an unreasonable design constraint on higher density development. This aspect of the standard is therefore, not required to be met.

### Stage 1 ASSESSMENT

At the end of this stage  
ask Key Questions:

**Q1. Q2. Q6. Q7.  
Q.14 Q15.**

### Stage 2 INVOLVEMENT

At the end of this stage  
ask Key Questions:

**Q3.**

### Stage 3 EVALUATION

At the end of this stage  
ask Key Questions:

**Q4. Q11. Q12. Q13.**

### Stage 4a STRATEGIC DESIGN

At the end of this stage  
ask Key Questions:

**Q5. Q8. Q9. Q10.  
Q16. Q17. Q18. Q19.  
Q20. Q21. Q22. Q24.  
Q25. Q26. Q27. Q28.  
Q29. Q30. Q31. Q32.  
Q33. Q34. Q43. Q44.**

### Stage 4b DETAILED DESIGN

At the end of this stage  
ask Key Questions:

**Q23. Q35. Q36. Q37.  
Q38. Q39. Q40. Q41.  
Q42. Q45. Q46. Q47  
Q48. Q49. Q50. Q51.  
Q52. Q53. Q54. Q55.  
Q56.**

## Applying the key questions to applications

This Checklist asks 56 key questions that are grouped under 12 topics. At first, the number and length of questions may seem onerous and daunting. However, if applicants/agents follow the design process recommended by Circular 01/2006 of: assessment; involvement; evaluation; and design, relevant key questions need only be answer at the end of each stage.

### Stage 1 - Assessment

This stage applies to all types of development. Applicants / agents should demonstrate that they have looked at the context of the site and its surroundings. The size of the area to be surveyed and the detail of the survey will depend on the sensitivity and the scale of the development. The assessment should appraise the physical, social and economic characteristics of the site and the surroundings as well as existing planning policies.

### Stage 2 - Involvement

The Council encourages all applicants to discuss their proposals with the local community as this will help to speed up the development control process. The extent of such consultation will depend on the sensitivity and scale of the proposal. Applicants / agents for large scale developments should consult local communities in accordance with the Council's Statement of Community Involvement (SCI).

Applicants / agents should clearly show what groups, people and, where appropriate, specialist consultants have been consulted and how the findings of any consultations have informed decisions about the scheme's development.

### Stage 3 - Evaluation

This stage applies to all types of development. Applicants / agents should evaluate the information collected in the previous two stages and identify opportunities and constraints that will inform the scheme. Evaluation may involve resolving conflicting issues. Different options for development should be explored and a preferred option brought forward.

### Stage 4 - Design

Once the development options have been evaluated and any potential conflicts resolved, the scheme design can start which should be guided by earlier stages and can be divided into two closely linked stages: Strategic Design Issues; and Detailed Design Issues.

#### Strategic Design Issues

This sub-stage generally applies to large developments and normally requires design guidance (such as a masterplan) to illustrate the strategic design and demonstrate it can be implemented. However, there are some questions that will apply to all types of development. At this stage it is important to consider strategic issues such as: creating an urban structure; making connections, ensuring the form and scale of building are informed by the surroundings; and strategies for energy, resource and waste minimisation and collection, car parking, and architecture.

#### Detailed Design Issues

This sub-stage applies to all scales of development and will usually be considered at the reserved matters / detailed planning application stage. Larger development will normally require design codes to guide the detailed design. At this stage it is important to consider the detailed design of streets and open spaces (including integration of car parking into such spaces), appearance and layout of buildings.

## What key questions apply to my development?

Due to the complexity of a particular site and development, the Council cannot identify which key questions are relevant to each type of development. Applicants and their agents should therefore answer all key questions in their design and access statement and identify those that are relevant. This will help applicants and their agents to explain and justify their proposals. Below is an example of fictional application to demolish a house and erect eight residential units, which shows how some of the key questions could be answered.

- Q1** *The site and its context has been appraised and included in Section 1 of our design and access statement.*
- Q2** *The development does not require an EIA.*
- Q3** *In accordance with the Council's SCI, community consultation is not necessary for our application. However, we have consulted the neighbours and a schedule of their comments, together with how we have taken account of their comments are included in Appendix A of our design and access statement.*
- Q4** *A constraints and opportunities plan is included in Section C of our design and access statement.*
- Q5** *A conceptual design was prepared and was considered appropriate by Council Officers at our pre-application meeting (see Appendix B of our design and access statement for minutes of the meeting).*
- Q6** *We have undertaken investigations and established that the site and its surroundings have no archaeological value, nor does it have or potentially have value for wildlife.*
- Q7** *No archaeology exists on the site. Existing trees and vegetation have been surveyed and shown on our existing site plan. Existing trees are not subject to a TPO.*
- Q8** *As noted in response to key question 6, the site has no value for archaeology or wildlife. This question is therefore irrelevant.*
- Q9** *See response to question 6 and 8.*
- Q10** *The development site is not within the Forest of Avon Area. This question is therefore irrelevant.*
- Q11** *We have established the site is within a 400m radius of a local centre (see Section 1 of our design and access statement). Therefore, the site has potential to be developed between 30 – 50 dph.*
- Q12** *The development is not of sufficient size to extend an existing centre and public transport service. This question is therefore irrelevant.*
- Q13** *We propose a mixture of 1 and 2 bedroom flats, together with a 3 bedroom house. The detailed breakdown is shown in Section 2 of our design and access statement. The amount of development is below the Council's threshold to provide affordable housing.*
- Q14** *Due to numerous constraints on the site (identified in our constraints and opportunities plan), it is not possible to maximise its development potential. However, the development is within the density range identified in response to question 11.*
- Q15** *The different types of public open space within a walking distance of the site are identified in Section 1 of our design and access statement. This analysis show the site has access to variety of different types of public open space.*
- Q16** *The houses are provided with rear gardens of an appropriate size. Most of the flats are provided with balconies. Also, an area of shared open space is provided in a location where it is accessible to all residents.*
- Q17** *The development is not of sufficient size to require formal public open space provision. This question is therefore irrelevant.*
- Q18** *The development connects into the existing movement network as shown in Section 4 of our design and access statement. As identified in our constraints and opportunities plan, no opportunities exist for our development to connect into the wider green infrastructure.*
- Q19** *Section 5 of our design and access statement explains our strategies for minimising the use of energy and natural resources as well as the production of waste. We have assessed our strategies through a preliminary Code for Sustainable Homes assessment, which indicates we will achieve Level 3.*

## Examples of answers to the South Gloucestershire Design Checklist Key Questions



## Some Useful References and Links

The following is a selective list of references and links that are useful in designing development proposals. It is not, however, and exhaustive list.

*South Gloucestershire Council Publications available at [www.southglos.gov.uk](http://www.southglos.gov.uk).*

### **Biodiversity and the Planning Process**

South Gloucestershire Council. (Planning guidance approved November 2005)

### **Conservation Area Character Appraisals**

*South Gloucestershire Council, available for most of the Conservation Areas with the South Gloucestershire area.*

### **The Minerals and Waste Local Plan**

(adopted May 2002)  
South Gloucestershire Council 2002

### **Landscape Character Assessment**

(adopted August 2005)  
South Gloucestershire Council SPD

### **Play Policy and Strategy**

South Gloucestershire Council (December 2006)  
*Sets out the Councils understanding of play and confirms its commitments for play, hanging-out and informal recreation.*

### **South Gloucestershire Local Plan**

(adopted January 2006)  
South Gloucestershire Council 2006

### **Statement of Community Involvement**

*Explains how everyone can be involved in preparing new development plans and in consulting on planning applications. (emerging)*

### **Trees on Development Sites**

South Gloucestershire Council (Planning guidance adopted November 2005)

### **Sustainable Drainage Systems**

South Gloucestershire Council (August 2002)

### **The Local List**

South Gloucestershire Council SPD (emerging)

### **Waste Audits**

South Gloucestershire Council SPG (July 2002)  
*Explains what is required of a waste audit to meet the provisions of Policy 37 of The Minerals and Waste Local Plan.*

*Other References and Links.*

### **By Design – Better places to live - A companion guide to PPG3**

DTLR & CABE 2001

### **By Design. Urban design in the Planning System: Towards a Better Practice.**

DTLR and CABE 2000

### **Car Parking – What Works Where?**

English Partnerships 2006

### **The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE)**

*The government's advisor on architecture, urban design and public space [www.cabe.org.uk](http://www.cabe.org.uk)*

### **Home Zone – Design Guidelines**

IHE 2002

### **Environment Agency**

*Protects and improves the air, land and water within England [www.environment-agency.org.uk](http://www.environment-agency.org.uk)*

### **Forest of Avon**

[www.forestofavon.org](http://www.forestofavon.org)

### **Manual for Streets**

*The Department for Communities and Local Government, the Department for Transport and the Welsh Assembly Government 2007*

### **Lifetime Homes**

[www.lifetimehomes.org.uk](http://www.lifetimehomes.org.uk)

### **Places, Streets and Movement:**

*A companion guide to Design Bulletin 32 – Residential roads and footpaths DETR 1998a*

### **Safer Places – The Planning System and Crime Prevention.**

ODPM and Llewelyn Davies 2004

### **Urban Design Compendium**

English Partnerships & The Housing Corporation 2001



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