Design Quality and Building for Life 12:

Lessons learnt from assessments of developments in North Northamptonshire completed in the 2012-13 Monitoring period

North Northamptonshire Joint Planning Unit

BUILDING FOR LIFE

HBF HOME BUILDERS FEDERATION

DESIGN FOR HOMES

Design Council

CABE

Introduction

Building for Life 12 (BfL 12) is the industry standard for the design of new housing developments. Cabe firmly believes that housing should be attractive, functional and sustainable. The Building for Life 12 (BfL 12) guide presents how this can be achieved. The Building for Life 12 (BfL 12) is led by three partners: Cabe at the Design Council, the Home Builders Federation and Design for Homes supported by Nottingham Trent University. It is based on the new National Planning Policy Framework and the Government's commitment to build more homes, better homes and involve local communities in planning. This guide is based on a set of 12 questions and a traffic light scoring system, which has been designed to help local planning authorities assess the quality of proposed and completed developments; and as a point of reference in the preparation of local design policies. It can also be used by anyone who has an interest in new homes and neighbourhoods to help people create better placed to live.

Building for Life (BfL), and now Building for Life 12, have been used as a tool to assess the quality of completed development across North Northamptonshire since 2008. The findings of those assessments have been reported in the North Northamptonshire Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) each year. Overall, the data gathered via these assessments indicates an upward trend in the design quality of new developments, though there remains much that we can all learn to improve the quality of new schemes further.

This booklet has been compiled to illustrate strengths and weaknesses under relevant BfL12 criteria, observed in the most recent round of BfL12 assessments (2012-13). In this way, both positive and less positive learning points can be shared as widely as possible, with the aim of continuing to improve the overall quality of developments in North Northamptonshire.

It should be highlighted that in the majority of schemes assessed for the 2012-13 monitoring period, both strengths and weaknesses were identified. As such, it should not be assumed that because an element of a scheme may be highlighted as less successful, the development overall is inherently poor. It should be noted however, that BfL 12 assumes that achieving 12 'greens' creates the basics of a 'good' development.

The criteria most consistently assessed as being weaker were 'character' (5) and 'streets for all' (9). These should therefore be areas of focussed discussion in schemes coming through the planning system. 'Parking' (10) is also commonly a challenging issue, with most schemes incorporating areas where parking appears to be well integrated and some areas where solutions appear to have been less successful.

1 Connections

Does the scheme integrate into its surroundings by reinforcing existing connections and creating new ones, whilst also respecting existing buildings and land uses along the boundaries of the development site?



Left: Properties have been orientated to front toward the existing street, albeit that there is no direct vehicular access. A pedestrian route has been incorporated, allowing residents convenient access to the existing 'local centre' on the opposite side of the street (albeit they still have to cross the grass adjacent to the carriageway!) (Land off Butland Road, Corby).



Right: Pedestrian route between blank gable walls, and rear boundary fences (Kings Meadow, Higham Ferrers)



Left: Pedestrian link between a new development and neighbouring houses – narrow, overgrown and uninviting. (Thurston Drive, Kettering)

Right: Houses turn their backs on publicly accessible open space, thus limiting its attractiveness and function. (Kings Meadow, Higham Ferrers)



2 Character

Does the scheme create a place with a locally inspired or otherwise distinctive character?



Left: This scheme retains existing mature trees around the periphery of the site, and draws on these features (and surrounding architecture) for a distinctive architectural approach. (Land off Copenhagen Road, Corby)

Right: Houses on this scheme have been designed to replicate distinctive architectural detailing found on surrounding properties. The creation of a distinctive character is however undermined by weaker attention to the public realm (i.e. the streets and the functions of those streets). (Bosgate Close, Bozeat)





Left: Flats have a contemporary appearance. Existing mature trees have been retained, which helps the new build to feel more established than it is. (Gold Street, Wellingborough)

Right: The public square in this development is a key focal point. The quality of the public realm here, enclosed by buildings and parking on all sides creates a distinct sense of place and character. (Kingswood, Corby)





Left: Few obvious distinguishing characteristics. (Thurston Drive, Kettering)

3 Creating well defined streets and spaces

Are buildings designed and positioned with landscaping to define and enhance streets and spaces, and are buildings designed to turn corners well?



Above: Open space and water area benefit from strong sense of enclosure created by built form and tree planting.



Above: Some strong corner units.



Above: Play area sited behind properties. Rear elevations weaken definition of this space.



Above right: Public footpath and open space located between the sides and backs of houses, which weakens the sense of definition.

(All images: Kings Meadow, Higham Ferrers)

4 Streets for All

Are streets defined in a way that encourage low vehicle speeds and allow them to function as social spaces?



Right: Highway dominated turning head, not enclosed by and development. (Thurston Drive, Kettering)



Right: Space left over by a visibility splay. (Kingswood, Corby)

Left: Low speed environment, with higher quality materials creates potential for this area to be used as social space. (Gold Street, Wellingborough)



Left: Street not enclosed by built frontage, but garden boundaries. Standard highway surfacing. None of these elements are conducive to creating a space for people to socialise. (Bosgate Close, Bozeat)



5 Car Parking

Is resident and visitor parking sufficient and well integrated so that it does not dominate the street?



Left: Parking in a square is well enclosed, well overlooked and convenient for residents. But could benefit from additional landscaping (Butland Road, Corby)

Below: Parking integrated around flat development in a range of ways, including frontage parking, and integrated parking. The combination of solutions prevents visual dominance of parking. (Gold Street, Wellingborough)



Right: On street parking around the edge of the square for residents and visitors. Although parking is in a prominent location, the arrangement of space and buildings prevents parking from being the dominant feature. (Kingswood, Corby)







Left: Frontage parking appears well used, and convenient for residents. However, lack of front boundary treatment and strong landscaping makes parking a dominant visual feature of the street.(Thurston Drive, Kettering.)

Right and below: Parking designed at the backs of properties. Tandem and cut out spaces are underutilised. Dimensions of spaces appear tight and spaces often used for bin storage resulting in residents and visitors parking along the street. (St Mary's Road, Kettering.)







Above left: Space in front of garage was not intended for parking, resulting in the parked car overhanging the footpath. Suggests parking provided has not been positioned in the most convenient location for residents. (Land off Copenhagen Road, Corby)



Above right: Parking spaces visible in the foreground, though this resident opts to park closer to their house! (Land off Copenhagen Road, Corby)





Above and left: Front and back view. No cars parked in the rear semi private courtyard. Numerous cars parked on street at the front however. (Kingsmeadow, Higham Ferrers)

6 Public and Private Spaces

Will public and private spaces be clearly defined and designed to be attractive, well managed and safe?



Left: Public space is enclosed and defined by relatively continuous built form. This provides actual and perceived overlooking of the space. (Kingswood, Corby)

Below: Strong vertical front boundary treatments provide clear definition between public and private space. (Left: St Mary's Road, Kettering. Right: Land south of Copenhagen Road, Corby)







Left: In contrast to the strong front boundary treatments above, lack of a front boundary treatment contributes to looser definition of the public and private realm, as well as charcater. (Thurston Drive, Kettering)

Right: A public footpath runs between properties and overlooks private and semi private spaces. Fronts of houses face the backs of neighbouring houses. All of these elements serve to blur the definition between what is public and what is private space. (Kingsmeadow, Higham Ferrers)





Left: Planned as a community orchard, the above space appears to have little community use in its current state. (Land off Copenhagen Road, Corby)

Right: Undeveloped land above easement – publicly accessible from shared parking area. No other apparent function. (Land off Copenhagen Road, Corby)



6 External Storage and Amenity Space

Is there adequate external storage space for bins and recycling as well as vehicles and cycles?



Left: Ginnels can reduce drag distances to the back gardens for bins, and provide greater security for residents than rear alleyways. No evidence of bins stored in inappropriate locations observed on this site. (Butland Road, Corby)



Right: Side and rear alleyways provide means to access back gardens directly, but often create longer routes. This example is relatively well overlooked and short compared to many, though ownership and maintenance could be potential issues here. (Kingswood, Corby)



Left: Terraced houses on this site regularly have rear access to back gardens via rear alleyways. A number of properties were observed storing wheelie bins in front of garage doors, as this appeared more convenient. (Land south of Headway, Corby)



Left: Small back garden, and tight rear cut in parking space have resulted in residents using the parking space to store bins and parking on street (St Mary's Road, Kettering)



Right: Evidence that residents are storing bins at front where they were not intended. As these properties are located on a private drive, residents would already need to drag their bins to the end of the drive for collection. (Thurston Drive, Kettering)