Design Quality and Building for Life 12:

Lessons learnt from assessments of developments in North Northamptonshire completed in the 2013-14 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?

BfL Criterion 1

Left: Properties have been orientated toward an internal pedestrian route which is incorporated to allow residents convenient access via a well connected public space (Knights Court, Wellingborough). Right: Private drives fenced, so no connection for pedestrians, Corby









Nippendale, Rushden, above left and right: This is not lit or overlooked, creating an unsafe area after dark. It conne developments with footpaths, but these are again not overlooked leading to undesirable alley ways.

2 Character

Does the scheme create a place with a locally inspired or otherwise distinctive character?
BfL Criterion 5



Broad Green, Wellingborough – scale & form ties links with neighbouring properties, alongside the use of natural stone creates distinctive character



New terrace fits in well with existing Victorian terraced street context. Dryden Street, Kettering



Cottages at White Lodge Farm, Burton Latimer create a distinctive rural character.

3 Working with the site and its context

Does the scheme take advantage of existing topography, landscape features (including water courses), trees and plants, wildlife habitats, existing buildings, site orientation and microclimate?

BfL Criterion 6



Victoria Road Rushden – Street aligns along view of existing tree, which helps add character, but level changes could have been dealt with better to create more space for landscaping and .

Site adjoins park and leisure centre, but does not relate to it – The Grange, Desborough



Existing historic factory converted to flats as part of the redevelopment – Dryden St, Kettering



4 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?



Entrance to street is all backs of garden walls – Radbrook Rise, Corby



Above: Good curving brick rear boundary wall in location where rear garden visible. (White Lodge Farm, Burton Latimer).



Problems of rear parking areas



Above right: Some houses do front onto the street, but there are a lot of blank flank walls. (Victoria Road, Rushden)

4 Streets for All

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



Main street is very wide and straight, even when cars are parked on the road. This could encourage high speeds.
No traffic calming measures.
Potentially dangerous for children to play in/nearby.



Left: Low speed, private parking courts are very low speed.
Curving layout of street also helps slow cars but main road doesn't feel very social (White Lodge Farm, Burton Latimer)



Right: Adoptable layout/design of street, together with the ubiquity of front-of-plot parking and lack of meaningful landscaping, means street fails to act as social space (Senwick Rd, Wellingborough), even though there are better materials used here.



Narrow streets, limited pavements, lack of landscaping create a vehicle dominated space, rather than a space for people. Radbrook Rise, Corby



Streets and central square create well overlooked public space, Dryden St, Kettering.

5 Car Parking

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



Left: Parking clearly occurring on existing streets, and question how much the rear parking is being used. People using the parallel spaces outside their houses fronting onto the internal square (Dryden Street & Field Street, Kettering).





Above Left: remote parking means people park on pavement and parking space is not used. Parking off turning head not attractive and needs landscaping (The Grange, Desborough).



Left: Good example of a front parking court, which people are using socially with seating/bird feeders put out. Residents report not enough visitor spaces. Some front gardens already converted to additional parking so cars don't have to be parked tandem (White Lodge Farm, Burton Latimer)



Rear courts are frequently underused and inconvenient, as people to prefer to park on street, inconvenient, and poor quality spaces without sufficient space for landscaping. (Eastfield Road, Finedon Road, Burton Latimer & Hill Road, Raunds)







Right: Parking generally convenient, on plot and not too dominant, but still problems with pavement parking where parking is located out of sight of house
(Ext to Radbrook rise off Gainsborough Road, Corby).





Left: Front-of-plot parking dominates the street (Earls Barton Road, Great Doddington) Needs tree planting and better surface materials to counteract this.



Remote triple tandem parking at Eastfield road – poor appearance and inconvenient. People parking on street in front of their houses instead**.**



Unallocated on street parking provides the greatest convenience and flexibility, and is what people choose to use, in preference to remote rear/side spaces and tandem spaces on their own plot. (Dryden St, Kettering)

6 Public and Private Spaces

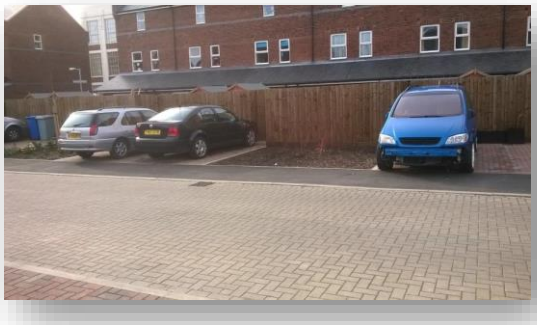
Will public and private spaces be clearly defined and designed to be attractive, well managed and safe?



Left: Clear defined boundary between public footpath and private land.



Right: Front boundary treatment inadequate to mark public/private divide, allowing desirable “defensible space”. (Eastfield Road, Wellingborough)



Left: Landscaped left over spaces to side and rear of dwellings already poorly maintained with rubbish (Dryden Street & Filed Street, Kettering). Clearly defined boundary between public and private spaces



Left over space with no function already uncared for – Finedon St, Burton Latimer

7 External Storage and Amenity Space

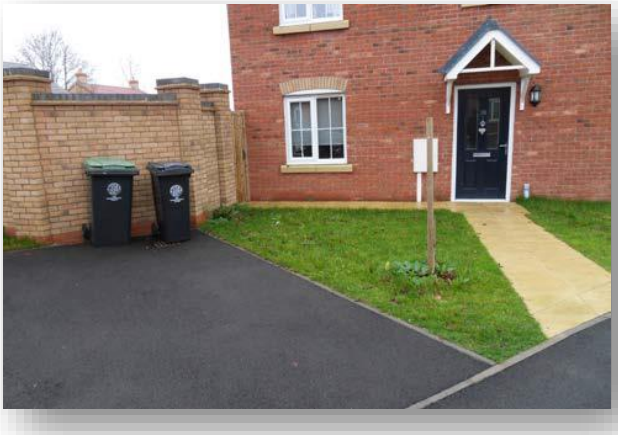
Is there adequate external storage space for bins and recycling as well as vehicles and cycles?



Right: No storage and bins are seen to be left in driveways instead of in back gardens (Former Broadlands Site, Victoria Road, Rushden).



Left: Area for bins at the front of the plots. This is screened by fencing which hides them from the public highway (90 Hill Street, Raunds).



Left: Bin storage area allocated, but poor provision for bikes (Buckwell End, Wellingborough)



Long bin alleys are not used as inconvenient, and pose a security risk. This one has a large sign saying its being monitored by CCTV (Dryden Road, Kettering).



Poor quality environment in rear court, Wellingborough

8 Easy to find your way around

Is the development easy to find your way around.

BfL Crieterion 8



Cul-de-sac layout – no pedestrian connection to the open space and leisure centre, even though its visible. The Grange Desborough



Eastfield Road, Wellingborough – various large rear courts create a confusing layout, and a lot of extra hard surfaced turning space.



Finedon Street, Burton Latimer – simple layout with new houses fronting the existing street.