



Design Guide 2

Planning Policy

2.1 PLANNING POLICY

NB Owing to the new West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031 not being due for adoption until 2017, the following Local Plan Policy information may be subject to further amendment. For confirmation of the current Policy position, please contact Planning Policy.

The principal sources of planning policy which underpin the West Oxfordshire Design Guide are the *National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2012)* and the *West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011 (WOLP 2011)*.

The District Council is preparing a new Local Plan which sets out a vision of the District in 2031 and provides an overarching framework to guide and deliver that vision (emerging WOLP 2031). Once adopted this will replace the WOLP 2011. It is anticipated the WOLP 2031 will be adopted in late Summer 2017.

2.2 THE NPPF

The *National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2012)* is explicit about the importance of good design and of understanding design in terms of context. Paragraph 17 (**Core planning principles**) states that: *planning should*

- *always seek to secure high quality design and a good standard of amenity for all existing and future occupants of land and buildings;*
- *take account of the different roles and character of different areas, promoting the vitality of our main urban areas, protecting the Green Belts around them, recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside; (...)*

The importance of good design and of understanding design in terms of context is reinforced in paragraphs 56–68 of Part 7 of the NPPF (**Requiring good design**):

- Paragraph 56: (...) *Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, is indivisible from good planning, and should contribute positively to making places better for people.*
- Paragraph 57: *It is important to plan positively for the achievement of high quality and inclusive design for all development, including individual buildings, public and private spaces and wider area development schemes.*
- Paragraph 58: (...) *Planning policies and decisions should aim to ensure that developments: (...) respond to local character and history, and reflect the identity of local surroundings and materials.*

The NPPF is also explicit in respect of the protection of the historic environment. Paragraph 17 (**Core planning principles**) states that:

- *planning should (...) conserve heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance; a principle reinforced and expanded upon in Part 12 of the NPPF (Conserving and enhancing the historic environment).*

2.3 THE EMERGING LOCAL PLAN 2031

In responding both to guidance contained in the NPPF and elsewhere, and to the strongly held view of residents of the District that: *this part of the country is a special place (...) which must not be eroded by decisions to accommodate inappropriate future development or other change* (emerging WOLP 2031, Paragraph 1.2), the emerging West Oxfordshire Local Plan, too, is explicit about the importance of good design, and of understanding design in terms of context.

The importance of design is set out in Paragraphs 4.32–4.35 of Part 4 of the emerging Local Plan (**Overall strategy**), and concludes with **Policy OS4 – High Quality Design**, which states: *High design quality is central to the strategy for West Oxfordshire. New development should respect and contribute to local distinctiveness and, where possible, enhance the character and quality of the surroundings and should:*

- *demonstrate high quality, inclusive and sustainable design with the provision of a safe, pleasant, convenient and interesting environment where the quality of the public realm is enhanced and the likelihood of crime and fear of crime is reduced; and*
- *not harm the use or enjoyment of land and buildings nearby including living conditions in residential properties; and*
- *demonstrate resilience to future climate change, particularly increasing temperatures and flood risk, and the use of water conservation and management measures; and*
- *preserve or enhance areas, buildings and features of historic, architectural and environmental importance, including unlisted vernacular buildings and habitats of biodiversity value; and*
- *enhance local green infrastructure and its biodiversity, including the provision of attractive, safe and convenient amenity open space commensurate with the scale and type of development, with play space where appropriate.*

*Designers of new development will be expected to provide supporting evidence for their design approach. They should have regard to specific design advice contained in supplementary planning guidance covering the District. **The West Oxfordshire Design Guide**, Landscape Assessments, Conservation Area Appraisals and Cotswolds AONB guidance documents*

are key tools for interpreting local distinctiveness and informing high design quality.

As with the NPPF, the emerging Local Plan is also explicit in respect of the protection of the historic environment. The importance of the historic environment is affirmed in Paragraphs 8.75–8.92 of Part 8 (**Environmental and heritage assets**), and concludes with **Policy EH7 – Historic Environment**, which states:

All development proposals should conserve or enhance the special character and distinctiveness of West Oxfordshire’s historic environment, and preserve or enhance the District’s heritage assets, and their significance and settings.

Proposals affecting non-designated heritage assets, such as locally listed buildings, will be assessed on the basis of the significance of the heritage asset and the scale of harm or loss to that heritage asset. The Council’s Conservation Area Appraisals should be used as a guide when assessing the significance of a heritage asset.

Proposals that will lead to harm to the significance of a designated or non-designated heritage asset or its setting will be resisted, unless a clear and convincing justification can be made to outweigh that harm.

Proposals that will lead to substantial harm to or total loss of the significance of a heritage asset or its setting, will be refused, unless the harm is outweighed by substantial, demonstrable public benefits or all the four tests set out in Paragraph 133 of the NPPF are met.

2.4 FURTHER GUIDANCE

At the national level, further detailed guidance on Planning matters is available from a variety of sources, including the government’s *Planning Practice Guidance*, which explains and greatly expands upon the policies set out in the NPPF.

Historic England is among several organisations to publish detailed advice in respect of design and context. Relevant guidance published by English Heritage includes: *Streets for All* (2004); *Conservation Principles, Policy and Guidance* (2008); *Understanding Place: Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management* (2011); and *The Setting of Heritage Assets* (2011).

At the local level, detailed guidance in respect of design and context is available from a number of sources, including: *the West Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment* (1998) and the Conservation Area Appraisals and Management Plans for the District's Conservation Areas. Sources of information relating in particular to the District's landscapes and the environment include: The Wychwood Project, The Lower Windrush Valley Project, The Cotswolds Conservation Board, and Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC).