



# Design Guide 11

## New Development & Context

## 11.1 NEW DEVELOPMENT AND CONTEXT

This section concentrates on proposals for new development, and in particular on new residential schemes. It sets out the processes and design considerations most likely to lead to a successful outcome; one that realises the aspirations of all those with an interest in the scheme, be they local communities, developers, land owners and planners.

The settlements of West Oxfordshire are covered by policies which describe the circumstances in which new development will be permitted.

Most new development will occur in sustainable locations within the towns and larger villages, where a wider range of facilities and services is already in place. However, smaller villages may also contain sites that can be sustainably developed.

**With all development proposals – but especially in the case of residential schemes – it is expected that, in terms of initial and on-going involvement with the District Council, the following three-part process will be followed:**

**1)** An initial pre-application inquiry should first be made in order to establish the relevant planning context, and to establish whether or not the principle of development on the site is acceptable in planning terms (See also: 11.2 PRE-APPLICATION ADVICE below);

**2)** If development on the site is deemed acceptable in principle, the second stage should be a comprehensive analysis of all relevant aspects of the site and context (See also: 11.3 UNDERSTANDING THE SITE AND CONTEXT below);

**3)** Following analysis of the site and context, initial concept plans should be drafted, showing the main aspects of the site and context, and outlining the location and nature of any proposed development (See also: 11.4 LARGER DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS below).

*In addition, Strategic Development Areas (SDAs) are covered at 11.15*

## 11.2 PRE-APPLICATION ADVICE

When a potential development site is identified, it is strongly recommended that contact is first made with the planning department, in order to gain a clear understanding of the planning context of the site; both to confirm what consents if any may be needed for the proposal, and to gain an indication of whether or not the principle of development on the site is likely to be supported in planning terms.

Early pre-application engagement with the council's planning department and other relevant stakeholders (such as local residents and statutory consultees) offers the best opportunity both for an outcome that will satisfy all those with an interest in the site, and for the smooth and timely progress of any subsequent planning applications.

Pre-application advice is available either by writing in to the council, or by using the pre-application advice form on the WODC website (LINK).

There is a charge for pre-application advice on new houses and major developments. The charge will vary depending on the scale of the proposed development. Details of the charges are available from the planning department (LINK).

The minimum information required for a pre-application enquiry would typically include details of the site (address and site boundary), type/ usage of development (e.g. residential or

commercial), and the extent of development (e.g. potential dimensions and locations of new structures on the site). Plans and elevations need to be drawn to scale, with dimensions shown in metres. NB It is recommended at this stage that a detailed masterplan is not only unnecessary, but inappropriate in the absence of a comprehensive analysis of the site and context.

### 11.3 UNDERSTANDING THE SITE AND CONTEXT

Where the principle of development is deemed acceptable in planning terms, fundamental to the success of any subsequent proposal will be a comprehensive analysis and understanding of the site and context. Only with this in place can a genuinely meaningful design solution be reached.

Each context, while potentially sharing some characteristics with other sites, represents a unique scenario with its own unique set of characteristics. Because of this, the council will seek to ensure that new development offers bespoke and locally resonant, rather than generic and non-specific, design solutions. The greater the level of analysis and understanding, the more meaningful and successful the design outcome is likely to be.

The nature of an existing site will be determined by a series of physical, economic and social characteristics, including location, size and topography, linkages, changes in land use and activity, and the design and development decisions of successive stakeholders over time. Aspects of the natural and historical environment that form a part of the context of a site will need to be considered with particular care, and appropriately reflected in proposals for the site. All relevant aspects of the site and immediate and wider contexts must be carefully assessed as part of the design process.

A residential development site may vary in scale from an infill plot within an existing settlement, whose development potential is limited to a single new dwelling – up to an extensive new area lying beyond the edge of an existing settlement, and whose development potential might encompass tens or even hundreds of new homes, and include the provision of related infrastructure such as new roads, a neighbourhood centre, shops or a new school.

The level of contextual analysis should always be commensurate with the scale and nature of the site, and of the associated development proposals. However, in all cases, from a small infill development up to a large mixed-use scheme, the same level of care should be taken to ensure that the final design responds meaningfully to its context.

Whatever the scale or nature of a proposed development, particular care should be taken to ensure that local character is respected or strengthened. This need not entail the slavish replication of surrounding housing layouts or house types, for example; however, it could involve drawing on locally distinctive aspects of design – for example, architectural details or materials – and should involve the preservation or enhancement of local character, and the avoidance of ‘dropped-in’ design solutions with little or no relevance to the unique context of the site.

Where no positive or meaningful precedents exist in terms of local settlement character or design upon which to draw, it is important that new development is nonetheless made as distinctive as possible – in order to create a clear, strong and locally resonant sense of place and identity, and in order to avoid the sense of an ‘anywhere’ design solution.

**11.4 The following represents a breakdown of the major aspects of context, expressed as a series of questions. These should be addressed at the initial stage of any development proposal, and should inform the design process itself, recognising the need for individually tailored design responses. The questions are arranged broadly hierarchically, dealing first with the wider aspects of context and progressing to more detailed aspects of context:**

1. What local or national planning policies or guidance are relevant to the site? *See also:* Design Guide 2: PLANNING POLICY
2. Does the site, or an adjoining similar or related site, have any relevant planning history?
3. What types of development, tenure and price range are needed in the area?
4. What considerations might inform the make-up of a given development? (Including, for example, planning policy in respect of affordable housing provision, or an assessment of local need?)
5. Who might be consulted as part of the planning process, and at what stage? (e.g. Parish or Town Councils, the owners of neighbouring properties, or statutory consultees such as Historic England, the County Highways Department or County Archaeologist).
6. Is the site sustainable in terms of accessibility, local facilities, infrastructure and services?
7. Who or what might be affected by the proposals, and in what ways?
8. What are the potential impacts in respect of neighbouring amenity?
9. How accessible, safe and legible are the approaches to the site, entry to the site and the site itself?
10. Are there any access, parking or Highways issues associated with the site?
11. How might the scheme work with the existing grain of the site, and take advantage or account of existing site orientation, topography, landscape features, roads and paths, trees and planting, ponds and watercourses, wildlife habitats, and existing buildings and features?
12. Are any designated heritage assets (such as Listed Buildings, Listed Parkland or Scheduled Monuments) likely to be affected by the proposals, and in what ways? *See also:* Design Guide 7: LISTED BUILDINGS, REGISTERED PARKS & SCHEDULED MONUMENTS
13. Are any non-designated heritage assets (such as Locally Listed Buildings or historical boundary features identified in a Conservation Area Appraisal) likely to be affected by the proposals, and in what ways? *See also:* Design Guide 6: CONSERVATION AREAS; Design Guide 7: LISTED BUILDINGS, REGISTERED PARKS & SCHEDULED MONUMENTS
14. Is any archaeology likely to be affected by the proposals, and in what ways? *See also:* Design Guide 7: LISTED BUILDINGS, REGISTERED PARKS & SCHEDULED MONUMENTS
15. Is the site within (or within the setting of) a Conservation Area, the AONB or other designated area? *See also:* Design Guide 6: CONSERVATION AREAS
16. If the site is within (or within the setting of) a Conservation Area, the AONB or other designated area, will the proposed development preserve or enhance this aspect of the area? *See also:* Design Guide 6: CONSERVATION AREAS
17. What are the key views within, into and out of the site, and how should any proposals take account of these?

18. Are any sensitive views (for example, of an important heritage asset or landscape) likely to be affected by the proposals, and in what ways?
19. Do any opportunities exist to enhance any key or sensitive views, or even to open up or further reveal any previously concealed or compromised views?
20. Are any important or protected habitats, trees, hedgerows, ponds or watercourses likely to be affected by the proposals, and in what ways? *See also:* 13 BIODIVERSITY & PROTECTED SPECIES
21. Are any important or protected species, such as bats or great crested newts, likely to be affected by the proposals, and in what ways? *See also:* Design Guide 13: BIODIVERSITY & PROTECTED SPECIES
22. Are there any drainage or flooding issues associated with the site?
23. Are there any other potential constraints to development on the site? (for example, in relation to safety, crime or hazardous materials).
24. Where constraints exist, what potential is there for their mitigation? *See also:* Design Guide 5: SETTLEMENT TYPE
25. In what ways might the development connect with the existing road, cycle, pedestrian and green network?
26. In what ways might the development connect with existing public transport?
27. What existing characteristics or features (including landform, trees and key buildings) may be worth retaining and incorporating into the proposed new development? *See also:* Design Guide 3: GEOLOGY & LANDSCAPE
28. What is the prevailing local settlement pattern in terms of development density and the arrangement and interrelationship of buildings, building lines, roads, footpaths, public and private space? *See also:* Design Guide 4: LOCAL CHARACTER; Design Guide 5: SETTLEMENT TYPE
29. What is the prevailing local built character in terms of building scale, form, type, style and materials? *See also:* Design Guide 4: LOCAL CHARACTER; Design Guide 8: STONework; Design Guide 9: ROOFS & ROOFING MATERIALS; Design Guide 10: WINDOWS & DOORS
30. What are the prevailing local surface and boundary treatments? *See also:* Design Guide 18: STREET SCENE & PUBLIC REALM
31. How can the various components of the development be arranged in order to create a strong and distinctive sense of place?
32. How is car parking on the site going to be addressed to enable sufficient and appropriate parking for homeowners, workers or visitors to the site?
33. How is storage – including outbuildings, garages, bike and bin stores – going to be incorporated into the scheme in such a way that the overall effectiveness and appearance of the scheme is not compromised?
34. How is waste storage and collection in particular going to be addressed?
35. Overall, what steps can be taken to ensure the creation of an attractive, desirable and efficient place to live, with improvements to quality of life, and enhancements to the historic, natural and built environment?

A thorough analysis of the site and context should not only underpin every development proposal, but aspects of the analysis should be submitted as part of any subsequent planning applications, in order to demonstrate a clear understanding of the site and context, and to provide meaningful justification for the final design solution.



Fig. 1 Aerial view of Chipping Norton

This information may take a number of forms, depending on the nature of the development proposal; however, it will typically be included in a Design and Access (D&A) Statement and a Landscape Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) for example.

Such information, submitted in support of planning applications, should not be compiled towards the end of the application process and retrofitted to a planning application in order merely to satisfy the requirements of the application procedure, or in order to provide post-event justification for the final development proposal.

Design and Access Statements should include a thorough analysis of the site (see *above*), and an accurate dimensional survey of the land and

buildings which are the subject of the proposals. The depth of analysis and the extent of the survey should be commensurate with the nature, scale and sensitivity of the proposed development. The analysis should address the suitability of the site to fulfil the brief, and highlight the inherent benefits and constraints of the site.

Further advice on Design and Access Statements can be found on the Government Planning Portal at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2013/1238/contents/made>

National guidance encourages applicants to carry out professional consultations and engage in community involvement at the earliest possible stage. Keep a record of the groups and people you have consulted with, and note the ways in which these consultations have informed subsequent development decisions.

Early and open consultation – not only with the planning department and any statutory consultees, but with others who may be affected by development proposals – provides the best opportunity for the early identification of potential issues, and a more efficient pre-application and application process.

### 11.5 LARGER DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS

The overarching ambition when designing larger schemes should always be for high quality, distinctive and meaningful place making; for the creation of highly desirable places to live, with all levels of design, from master plan through parking and bin provision to building detail, attended to with equal care.

Poor quality design of even minor aspects of a scheme can disproportionately undermine the appearance and success of the scheme as a whole.

Design is a highly skilled process, and there is no substitute for the services of an architect or other appropriately qualified designer – preferably with knowledge and experience of the District.

## 11.6 CHARACTER

For any development to be successful, it is fundamentally important that it has a strong and distinctive character. Pre-existing character not only resides in the built environment, but in a variety of aspects and features both natural and manmade; some conspicuous and others more subtle. Natural aspects and features contributing to local character may include topography, trees, hedgerows and watercourses. Manmade aspects and features may include tracks, paths and boundary treatments, such as walls and fencing. Careful attention to local hedgerow species or patterns of dry stone walling, for example, has the potential greatly to enhance the distinctiveness and local resonance of a new development.

In the case of a site within or immediately adjoining a settlement with a distinctive established character, it may be most appropriate to develop a scheme that echoes and builds sympathetically upon distinctive aspects and features of that settlement, in order to create a place whose character meaningfully relates to that of its context.

In the case of edge-of-settlement or more removed sites, however, or where the adjoining settlement does not have a distinctive established character, there may be greater scope for the creation of a place with a new and strongly defined character and identity of its own.

Larger developments fundamentally differ from smaller schemes in that they offer far greater potential for the creation of distinctive and characterful new places – rather than simply

additions to existing places. Because of this the onus on those responsible for their creation is all the greater.

With larger schemes, it may be appropriate to subdivide the site area into a number of distinctive character areas; the areas differentiated for example by changes in house and street type, and scale and density. As well as introducing variety and avoiding unrelieved expanses of identical development over a large area, this can also greatly enhance the scheme's legibility and ease of navigation.

In the case of locally inspired schemes, character should not merely be understood in terms of local house types and materials; but also, for example, in terms of locally distinctive settlement and street patterns, public and private open space, landscape, surface and boundary treatments.

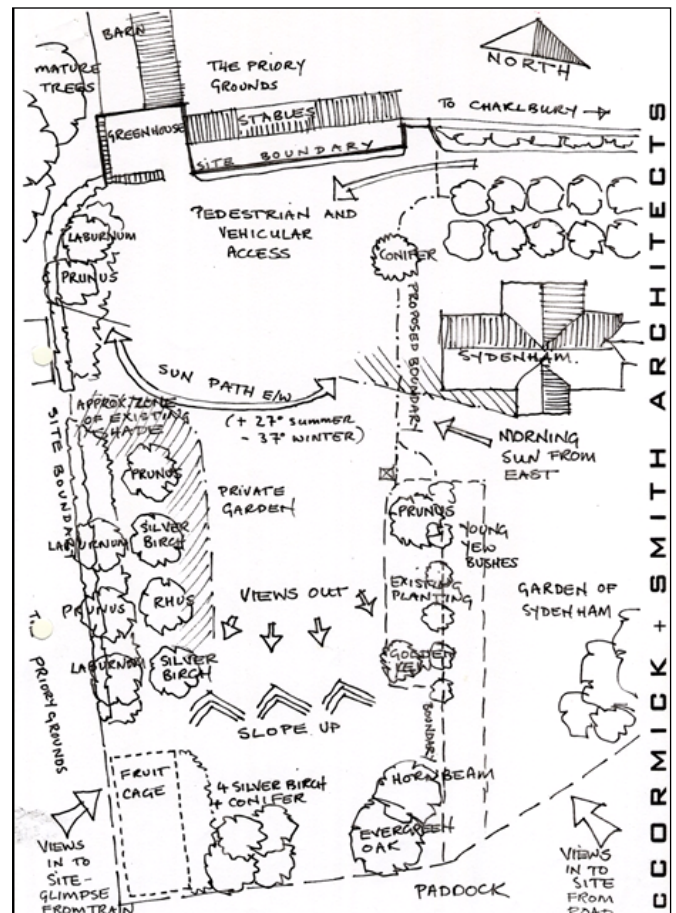


Fig. 2 Initial site analysis sketch

The following sections set out what are considered to be fundamental aspects of larger development proposals. It is expected that each of these will be carefully addressed as part of the design process.

### 11.7 EXISTING SITE AND CONTEXT

Following analysis of the site, early consideration should be given to what existing aspects or features of the site might be retained, enhanced, exploited or better revealed, and potentially incorporated into subsequent proposals for the site. These might include any of the following:

- Natural features, such as site orientation, topography, trees and vegetation, watercourses and ponds, and wildlife habitats;
- Routes and linkages, such as roads, tracks and footpaths;
- Built features, such as houses, outbuildings and walls;
- Heritage features, such as Listed or Locally Listed structures, or Scheduled Monuments (SMs);
- Views within, into and out of the site.

Older existing buildings on the site should be carefully assessed for their development/ conversion potential; as these can provide significant or defining focal point structures for the scheme. Non-designated heritage assets which make a positive contribution to the site, such as Locally Listed Buildings or non-designated period outbuildings, should be retained and re-used where viable, rather than being demolished to make way for new development.

Careful consideration should be given to the treatment of those parts of the site which adjoin neighbouring areas of development and landscape. For adjoining areas of existing development, this will entail having regard to the height, layout, building line and form of housing immediately bordering the site. Views of focal points beyond the site, such as existing landmark buildings or mature trees, could be framed or otherwise incorporated, or new views out of the site created.

### 11.8 CONNECTIONS AND STREETS

Larger schemes should be carefully integrated into their surroundings by reinforcing existing road, cycle and pedestrian routes; and by creating new ones – with particular attention paid to permeability and the access points onto the site.

Care should be taken not only to facilitate access onto and through the site, but to create clear desire lines to shops, pubs and public open spaces.

Connections and streets should be attractive, well lit, direct, legible and easy to navigate, well overlooked and safe, both for those living on the site and those passing through the development to get somewhere else. Streets should encourage low vehicle speeds; they should be pedestrian-, cycle- and child-friendly, and offer the potential for shared (rather than car-dominated) spaces with plenty of natural supervision.

Good buildings and strong landscaping should be used to create and enclose streets and spaces, with streets informed by the position of buildings and 'plumbed in' afterwards – rather than buildings being bolted onto the framework formed by an arbitrary or predetermined street layout.

A pattern of traditional road types/ spaces should be used to create a clear hierarchy of streets and to differentiate areas of housing within a scheme.



The careful use of street trees can have a dramatic effect on the character and appearance of streets and settlements (particularly as the trees mature). As well as making places distinctive, trees also offer further opportunities to differentiate areas within the same scheme, and to reinforce particular street and public space types. However, root protection (in respect of buried services, for example) will need to be considered, as will the on-going maintenance costs of all new planting.

### 11.9 HOUSING AND BUILDINGS

Residential developments should have a mix of housing types and tenures that suit local requirements. In each case, the scheme's housing mix must be justified with regard to planning policy, local context and viability. There is a requirement that with all housing developments of 100 or more dwellings, 5% of the residential plots will be serviced and made available for custom and self-build housing.



*Fig. 3 Strong and distinctive urban landmark building*

In order to ensure richness of character and identity, and a strong and meaningful sense of place, particular attention should be paid to the

mix of property types and residential density. Clear and imaginative variations in building typology, plot size and building position in relation to the street, for example, can be used to give interest, variety and legibility to a scheme.

Strong and characterful landmark buildings can be used not only to form focal points within schemes, and to aid navigation, but have the potential to play a defining role in the character and identity of places and settlements.

Great care should be taken to ensure that homes offer something to the street, with particular attention paid to detail, craftsmanship and building quality, and the space between front doors and the pavement.

The fronts of buildings, including front doors and habitable rooms, should face the street. Buildings should turn corners well, so that both elevations seen from the street have windows in them, rather than offering blank walls and gables to the street.

### 11.10 SERVICES AND FACILITIES

In the case of larger developments, it is important that careful consideration is given to whether there are sufficient services and facilities in the local area to support that development; and if not, how this can best be addressed. Services and facilities may include shops, schools and workplaces, pubs and cafés, community centres and play areas.

Where sufficient services and facilities are located close by, care should be taken to ensure that these are easily accessible by car, cycle and on foot. Where new local centres are needed, these should be easily accessible to the greatest number of residents, and should form vibrant, well-designed and distinctive places within the development.

Access to public transport should be integral to larger schemes, with care taken to ensure that the number of homes that are close to good, high frequency public transport routes is maximised.

### 11.11 LANDSCAPE AND OPEN SPACE

Private and public spaces should be clearly defined with walls, railings or planting, with sufficient budget allocated to ensure a high quality boundary, surface and landscaping scheme can be delivered, and then funded and managed on an on-going basis. This aspect of any new development should not be factored in as an afterthought, but should be integral to the overall design concept.

Careful consideration should be given to what types of open space might be appropriate, where these might be located, how they might be accessed, how spaces can be multi-functional and serve a wide age range, and how they might contribute towards enhancing biodiversity and the overall network of Green Infrastructure.

Engagement with local communities, being site specific and imaginative – for example in respect of retained wildlife habitats or play areas – increases the likelihood of a distinctive scheme that will be embraced by those living in and around the site.

Careful thought should be given to the size and shape of outside amenity and garden space. Rear gardens should be at least as large as the ground floor footprint of the dwelling, they should be accessible other than solely through the home, and benefit from passive supervision.

SUDS schemes, swales and other drainage strategies have the potential to bring significant landscape, amenity and wildlife enhancements to a scheme, and should be considered early in the design process, and carefully and imaginatively integrated into development proposals.

### 11.12 BIODIVERSITY AND GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE (GI)

With any new development, negative impacts on biodiversity should be minimised and gains in biodiversity sought where possible. Urban green space allows species to move around within, and between, settlements and the countryside, as well as offering a tool for managing environmental risks such as flooding, and contributing to public health and well-being, recreation and amenity.

See *also*: [http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/Images/GI-signposting\\_tcm6-11961.pdf](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/Images/GI-signposting_tcm6-11961.pdf) (Natural England GI signposting document) and: [http://www.tcpa.org.uk/data/files/TCPA\\_TWT\\_GI-Biodiversity-Guide.pdf](http://www.tcpa.org.uk/data/files/TCPA_TWT_GI-Biodiversity-Guide.pdf) (good practice guidance for green infrastructure and biodiversity)

See *also*: Design Guide 13: BIODIVERSITY AND PROTECTED SPECIES

### 11.13 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENTS (EIAs)

For some types of development (typically larger developments likely to have significant effects on the environment, or development within the AONB) an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) may be required. EIAs are intended to protect the environment by providing the local planning authority with a full understanding of the likely effects on the environment of a given development proposal, and to ensure the public are given meaningful opportunities to participate in the decision making process.

Whether an EIA is required (together with the scope of the EIA) will be determined at the pre-application stage, and will depend on whether the proposed development falls within the EIA Regulations, and is likely to have a significant effect on the environment.

See *also*: <http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk/blog/guidance/environmental-impact-assessment/> (Planning Practice Guidance on EIAs)

### 11.14 CAR PARKING AND STORAGE

Resident and visitor car parking and garaging should be sufficient (including taking into account local public transport provision and car ownership trends), well integrated so that it does not dominate the street, and located close to people's homes. The overall aspiration should generally be for carefully designed on-plot parking.

Where streets are designed to incorporate on-street parking, sufficient trees, planting and front garden space should be provided in order to balance the impact of parked cars, and to reinforce the spatial enclosure of the street.

With the exception of apartment typologies, rear parking courtyards are generally unacceptable. In larger developments, a range of parking solutions should be provided appropriate to the context and types of housing found across the scheme.

Dedicated bin and recycling storage should be fully integrated, out of sight and easily and conveniently accessible to homeowners, in order to ensure that these items are less likely to be left on the street. Distances between storage areas and collection points should be minimised.

Access to cycle and other outside storage (including garages and outbuildings) should be convenient and secure.

### 11.15 STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT AREAS (SDAs)

Further to the above, the following paragraphs set out additional expectations in respect of Strategic Development Areas (SDAs).

In order to guide consultations with applicants through both the pre-application and application stages for SDAs, the Council will encourage early pre-application discussions and the use of planning performance agreements.

Planning applications should be supported in the usual way, through the submission of appropriate documentation – including, for example, parameter plans, development specifications, design and access statements, transport assessments, environmental statements, flood risk assessments and drainage strategies, sustainability assessments and waste/ energy strategies.

Outline planning applications should be supported with clear evidence of strategic master planning, demonstrating how the application contributes to and delivers the key principles of the relevant SDA Policy, indicating the broad location of land uses, primary roads, surface water attenuation ponds, key footpath/ cycle links, open space, management proposals for public realm, infrastructure and community facilities and broad phasing.

Parameter plans should cover land use, access and movement, landscape and open space, density, maximum building heights and urban design framework. The Design and Access Statements should illustrate design principles and parameters that demonstrate how quality of design can be achieved, and should provide the basis for the scope and nature of future design control through subsequent Design Codes and Reserved Matters applications.

Applicants will be expected to demonstrate how they have incorporated high standards of design throughout, and how these will be carried through to completion. If the applicant is not the developer, the applicant will be expected to set out what steps will be taken to ensure that high standards are carried forward by subsequent developers.

### 11.16 DESIGN CODES

Following the approval of outline applications, it may be necessary for design codes to be submitted and approved in accordance with the principles set out in the relevant SDA policy and the proposed parameters in the outline planning applications.

The Design Code should systematically break down elements that contribute to the creation of high quality place making, starting with the most strategic elements. The strategic elements of the code will expand upon, and knit together, the themes established in the parameter plans submitted as part of the outline application.

The extent of the detailed coding elements will be established through negotiations between the Council and developers and their representatives, but should seek to address the following elements:

#### **The strategic issues should cover:**

- Block structure including types and principles and conceptual approach to townscape and roofscape design
- Street network and hierarchy
- Detailed design of primary spine roads, including adoptable street materials
- Conceptual landscape plans for open space, specifically addressing strategy for development edges
- Open space network, including approach to SUDS, youth/ play space provision and links to existing networks

#### **The detailed neighbourhood or geographical phase design codes should cover:**

- Character and sub area characters
- Key spaces and frontages
- Street types and street materials
- Building types and uses, building heights
- Boundary treatments
- Parking strategy (including cycle provision)
- Sustainable construction (approach and principles)
- Feature spaces (including public realm and landscape)
- Building materials and palette
- Edge principles and relationships between green infrastructure and built form

