



castlepoint

benfleet | canvey | hadleigh | thundersley

Castle Point
Borough Council
Urban Design
Characterisation

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Introduction

As part of the New Local Plan process the Council seeks to undertake an assessment of the urban design characteristics of Castle Point, to ensure that environmental considerations and high quality sustainable design are at the heart of the way the borough is shaped in the future.

CABE reinforce this as a positive way forward, stating that before starting to plan the changes for an area, an understanding, of how an area works now and how it came to be that way, should be reached, which can then be applied to shaping its future. CABE identify characterisation as a structural approach to understanding the physical context for a place. It is about identifying assets, qualities, constraints and opportunities.

This was also highlighted in the Urban Task Force document 'Towards an Urban Renaissance' and the subsequent review 'Towards a Strong Urban Renaissance', which stated that the best way to promote successful and sustainable regeneration, conservation and place-making is to consider urban design from the start of the planning and development process. The creation of successful places requires the recognition of its existing assets, combined with a strong vision of what that place could look like. A basic theme of good urban design is understanding the concept of local distinctiveness.

The Urban Design Compendium 1 considers that a thorough appreciation of the overall site context is the starting point for designing a distinct place.

Characterisation aims to bring together as many aspects of place as possible, in order to appreciate and understand it better. Buildings and structures define an area's sense of place and meaning, however an assessment of the townscape should also include extra elements, such as the relationship of the built form to topography, landscape and urban layout, and identifying landmarks and key views. These wider aspects of a place are essential elements in defining its particular character. The understanding of the combinations of all these elements can aid in achieving a quality of design intervention that responds to the genius loci or 'spirit of the place'.

The aim of this Urban Design Characterisation is to ensure that the good design within the borough is protected and the quality of the built environment is enhanced through the preparation of the Local Plan process.

This document sets out the policy context behind the Urban Design Characterisation, the methodology for undertaking the characterisation, and recommends a number of issues to be addressed as part of the New Local Plan process.

Policy Context

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) identifies good design as a key aspect of sustainable development and should contribute positively to making places better for people.

The NPPF makes it clear at Paragraph 57 that the importance of planning 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.

Local and neighbourhood plans should develop robust and comprehensive policies that set out the quality of development that will be expected for the area, based on an understanding and evaluation of its defining characteristics. This should include ensuring that development responds to local character and history, and reflects the identity of local surroundings and materials.

Whilst planning policies should not attempt to impose architectural styles or particular tastes, and should not stifle innovation, originality or initiative, the NPPF is clear that it is proper to promote or reinforce local distinctiveness.

The NPPF also recognises that securing high quality and inclusive design goes beyond aesthetic considerations, and as a result planning policies and decisions should address the connections between people and places and the integration of new development into the natural, built and historic environment.

By Design: Urban Design in the Planning System: Towards Better Practice is a guide to promoting higher standards of design. It advises that careful assessment of places, well-drafted policies, well-designed proposals, robust decision-making and a collaborative approach are needed throughout the country if better places are to be created. It identifies that a clear, comprehensive appraisal of the character of an area can provide a sound basis for development control and for developing initiatives to improve the area. Furthermore it can be used in the preparation of Local Development Framework documents, such as Local Plans, Master Plans, Design Briefs, Design Guides and Supplementary Planning Documents.

There are seven objectives of urban design contained within the CUBE document, as set out below:

- Character / Identity
- Continuity / Enclosure
- Quality of the Public Realm
- Ease of Movement / Permeability
- Legibility
- Adaptability / Robustness
- Diversity / Variety

An overview of each of these objectives, and the points to consider when undertaking the assessment of each objective, are set out in Appendix A of this document.

Better Places to Live by Design focuses on the attributes that underlie well-designed, successful environments. It expands on the seven urban design objectives highlighted in By Design, by identifying the aspects of the built form in more detail, as set out below:

- Layout: Urban Structure
- Layout: Urban Grain
- Landscape
- Density & Mix
- Scale: Height
- Scale: Massing
- Appearance: Details
- Appearance: Materials

Building for Life 12 is the industry standard, endorsed by Government, for well-designed homes and neighbourhoods. It provides 12 questions setting out the vision of what housing developments should be: attractive, functional and sustainable. The questions are grouped into three categories headed 'Integrating into the neighbourhood', 'Creating a place', and 'Streets & home', and are designed to aid in the preparation of local design policies, as well as assessing the quality of proposed and completed development.

This document states that design does not have to copy the style of the surrounding architecture to belong to an area, but may benefit by responding to the scale and materials of surrounding buildings, the aspects of the site and particular views. Furthermore the ability of new development to create a sense of place greatly depends on the quality of the buildings and the space around them.

Essex County Council have produced the Essex Design Guide and the Urban Place Supplement, which set out supplementary planning guidance to achieving the aims of requiring all new development to be well designed and compatible with its surroundings. They highlight the importance of detailed elements of design such as establishing distinct character throughout developments, but at the same time creating variety and diversity.

Methodology

The majority of development in Castle Point has taken place during the post-war period. As a result, some areas have been developed as suburban estates, whilst other areas have been developed on site by site basis. The assessment has therefore been carried out at an 'estate' level in order to effectively identify areas of design similarity.

A desk based exercise was undertaken in August 2010 to initially identify boundaries to 'estates' on ordnance survey maps of Benfleet, Hadleigh and Thundersley, and Canvey. The boundaries were defined using general street and plot patterns clearly evident from these maps. Each area was given a reference number either BEN-THUN-HAD or CAN.

A survey form was composed using the objectives identified from CABE's document By Design in order to ensure that all of the relevant elements were noted as part of the site surveys. These cover the following subjects:

- Building Appearance
- Building Form / Layout
- Movement
- Natural Features
- Topography
- Ancillary Features
- Feel
- Facts

An example of the site survey form, which listed all of the relevant points to note, is contained in Appendix B of this document.

Site surveys were undertaken throughout the period of August 2010 and January 2011. This involved walking round each 'estate', completing the survey forms and taking photographs around each of the 'estates'. A number of slight adjustments were made to the 'estate' boundaries as a result of the site surveys. An outline of the final 'estate' boundaries is contained in Appendix C of this document.

Following the completion of the site surveys an assessment of each area/'estate' was undertaken against the seven urban design objectives set out above. The results of these assessments are attached at Appendix D, together with a sample of the site photographs.

It should be noted that the Council recognises that the built environment also includes historic elements. The County Council has carried out a separate piece of work to assess the quality and sensitivity of the historic environment. It is also recognised that the built environment is intrinsically linked to the natural environment and landscape. This work is also being carried out separately.

Results

The detailed site surveys and assessment of the study areas identified a number of trends and issues across the Borough specific to each urban design objective, as set out below. It should be noted that the assessment has been undertaken purely against the seven urban design objectives. The assessment does not take into account land use allocations or other planning policies.

Character/Identity

The Borough is dominated by residential development, with a vernacular which comprises of an eclectic mix of detached, semi-detached and terraced houses, chalets and bungalows, interspersed with two, three and four storey blocks of flats, creating a mixed character across the Borough as a whole. The roofscape is varied in design and height with flat, pitched, hip, gable, sloping and mansard styles present within the Borough.

The majority of the residential dwellings are constructed of traditional materials comprising of brick and tiles. These do vary in colour, including red, brown, buff, yellow, grey, cream and white. The properties of more modern design and materials stand out against the extensive backdrop of traditional dwellings.

The majority of dwellings are detailed by a mix of elements, including contrasting brick colours and patterns, render, pebble dash, hanging tiles, wood and Upvc cladding, mock Tudor, and glazing. Variety is also added to the streetscenes by numerous front projections, taking the form of porches, canopies, bow and bay windows, dormers and garages.

Many of the dwellings have also been extended in a variety of ways adding interest in some places and discord in others. The extensions take the form of single and two storey in height, to the front, side and rear of dwellings. Whilst many are sympathetic to the original dwelling and its surroundings, there are equally many which create unattractive features which detract from the streetscene.

Whilst it is clear that there is no discernable character or identity to the Borough as a whole, other than being a Borough of mixed residential properties, it should be noted that there are a number of groupings of dwellings which exhibit the same design and/or pattern of layout, such as roofscapes, fenestration, front projections, detailing and materials, and open plan estates. These form small character areas and are worthy of comment.

There are a number of areas and streets which are characterised by semi-detached dwellings, mainly bungalows which retain a symmetrical roofscape, both to their front and side roof planes. Such areas include to the south of Jotmans Lane (BEN-THUN-HAD 5). These create a distinct and attractive character which are worthy of retention and repetition. A number of these pairs have been altered in the form of front and/or side dormers, and/or gable ends created from hip ends, resulting in the loss of symmetry to the pairs. These are not considered to represent good design features and detract from the otherwise distinct character.

There are a number of streets which are characterised by semi-detached bungalows which are orientated through 90 degrees to face the centre of a road junction, rather than creating enclosed spaces and side gardens. This is particularly evident on junctions to the south of Jotmans Lane. This creates an open aspect to the junction, with a triangular section of grass verge separating the front gardens from the highway. This is considered to be a unique feature to the Borough and should be encouraged within new residential schemes.

A number of dwellings have taken advantage of the undulating topography in parts of the Borough, which exhibits significant gradients in parts, such as Southwell Road in area BEN-THUN-HAD 12 and Boyce Green in area BEN-THUN-HAD 9. This has resulted in split level dwellings, many with balconies to their front, side and rear elevations, to take advantage of the views.

One area of the Borough, Benfleet Road and Vicarage Hill (BEN-THUN-HAD 14), has a high concentration of larger dwellings with grand facades and entrances set back from the highway with sweeping driveways and strong means of enclosure. Whilst all of individual designs, their concentration in one area of the Borough forms a distinct character.

There are two 'estates' within the Borough, Thorney Bay Road (CAN 12) and Sixty Acres (CAN 1), which are formed of mainly detached and semi-detached houses all of similar design and it is easy to identify when entering these areas. However they are reflective of many modern 'planned' estates and as a result could be located anywhere, and do not define the Borough identity.

There are a number of 'estates' originally constructed of Council housing, which are considered to exhibit distinctive character and are easily identifiable. One such area is The Avenues (CAN 3A). Groupings of dwellings are formed, mostly in terraced form, some creating crescents around green open spaces and pedestrian walkways, with garage and parking courts located to the rear. As with the 'estates' described above these reflect other former Council housing found elsewhere in the country.

With regard to layout within the built up area, apart from the notably areas above, there is a regular pattern of dwellings fronting onto highways. Roads run both east and west and north and south throughout the Borough, creating linear/grid patterns and occasional loops. These are interspersed by many cul-de-sacs. This layout is not memorable, but is a characteristic of the Borough.

The dwellings occupy plots which generally adhere to the Council's Adopted space standards, with slight variations in plot widths, depths and isolation spaces. Building lines are mixed across the Borough, often reflecting the curvature of the road layout. Those with strong building lines are clearly distinguishable and create a welcome change in the streetscene.

Outside of the built up area, the residential development is more sporadic, properties are larger and more spaced out. The road layout is more uncoordinated, many are unmade and areas are more heavily wooded.

Other development within the Borough consists of shopping areas, including town centres and industrial areas. These are clearly identifiable and the buildings contained within these areas are typically characteristic of such areas. They form an eclectic mix of old and new structures, ranging in height, size and materials, and could be located anywhere, and do not stand out against other similar areas.

The Borough also provides two sites containing hazardous installations, on the south of Canvey Island (CAN 10). These are dominated by large storage tanks, and whilst not attractive features, they are a unique character to the Borough.

Two mobile home parks (Kings (CAN 25) and Kingsley Park (BEN-THUN-HAD 37)) and one caravan park (Thorney Bay CAN 11)) are also located within the Borough. The nature of the structures located in these areas results in distinct characteristics.

Street furniture varies across the Borough and in the residential areas is fairly low key, comprising of litter, recycling and dog foul bins, benches, bollards, post boxes, telephone boxes, salt boxes, cycle racks, notice boards, flower planters, and equipment cabinets, which do not dominating the streetscape. Within the town centre and shopping areas there is often a proliferation of street furniture, together with advertisements and signage which results in a cluttering of these streetscapes. Infrastructure is evident in most parts of the Borough with telegraph and electricity poles together with lighting columns present in most streets. It should be noted that it is clearly evident where these structures are not present, and this creates a different streetscape. In some places lighting is provided by fixtures attached to electricity or telegraph poles which reduces the amount of street furniture.

Electricity sub stations are also present around the Borough. Most are not attractive in appearance, with many covered in graffiti.

Continuity & Enclosure

In terms of enclosure this is mixed across the Borough.

Residential properties in the built up areas of the Borough have clearly defined front gardens, indicated by fences, brick walls, some of which are decorative, railings, hedges, planting, mainly low level. Corner plots are mainly enclosed by 2m fences, walls and trees/planting.

A number of the open plan estates within the Borough provide no means of enclosure, such as The Avenues (CAN 3A) and The Rundels (BEN-THUN-HAD 36). In many cases there is a clear distinction between public and private space within these estates, with changes in surface materials and grass areas. However a number of those that provide open grassed areas, and rely on these to also provide front gardens to properties create blurred edges and confusion as to where the public areas end and the private areas begin.

The more isolated dwellings located within the Borough are strongly enclosed by high and dense hedging and planting or and/or railings and electronic gates. This creates an impression of properties being closed off from the roads and is quite an imposing feature.

A fairly modern estate within the Borough should also be noted for its means of enclosure, Sixty Acres (CAN 1). It is almost wholly contained by a continuous 'wall' of 2m+ fencing. This gives the impression of the area being 'closed off' and turning its back on its surroundings. It is not considered a pattern of development which should be replicated.

Commercial properties have enclosure more reflective of the uses occupying the premises, such as hoop railings, chainlink, mesh and palisade fencing. Many dominate the streetscene, and are not considered to be attractive features, particularly as many are in a poor state of repair. However they clearly define the boundaries to these areas and create the necessary protection that is associated with such uses.

Many of the commercial properties do however have blurred boundaries, particularly to their frontages, where no clearly defined edges are created between the public highway and private forecourts. This is particularly evident in Manor and Charfleets trading estates (BEN-THUN-HAD 45 and CAN 6).

Bollards and railings are found throughout the Borough to delineated areas of public and private space and to deter vehicles from accessing certain areas. However there is no consistency with the design, size and construction of these.

Overall enclosure is considered to be generally good throughout the Borough.

With regard to continuity the majority of the developed areas of the Borough are created by built form across almost the whole widths of plots, which does not lend itself to the creation of excessive gaps or breaks between the built form and as a result produces a good level of continuity.

The more remote areas have a sporadic pattern/layout, with larger properties occupying wider plots with gaps and breaks between them, which create a level of discord rather than continuity. This pattern has and could in the future lead to extensions being constructed on an ad hoc basis and add further discord to these areas.

Despite this it is considered that continuity is generally good across the Borough.

Quality of the Public Realm

The public realm within the Borough comprises of the residential streets, town centre, shopping and commercial areas, and the areas of open space.

There are pockets of streets which are provided with grass verges and street trees, which are mostly well maintained and create a 'leafy' feel. Furthermore a number of the areas provide grass areas adjacent to junctions which create an open and spacious feel.

Many of the streets have public footpaths on both sides which are of adequate width and are well maintained. However there are still many identified as being in a poor state of repair, and/or not wide enough to accommodate all pedestrians adequately.

There is a proliferation of on street parking in parts of the Borough, which clutters the streetscene. Furthermore many of the vehicles park on the footpaths and grass verges, which damages these spaces.

Street furniture varies across the Borough and in the residential areas is fairly low key, not dominating the streetscape. Within the town centre and shopping areas there is often a proliferation of street furniture, together with advertisements and signage which results in a cluttering of these streetscapes, and creation of obstacles for pedestrians. Electricity sub stations are also present around the Borough. Most are not attractive in appearance, with many covered in graffiti.

Infrastructure is evident in most parts of the Borough with telegraph and electricity poles together with lighting columns present in most streets. It should be noted that it is clearly evident where these structures are not present, and this creates a different streetscape. In some places lighting is provided by fixtures attached to electricity or telegraph poles which reduces the amount of street furniture.

A high proportion of properties are orientated to face onto the streets and create a good level of natural surveillance, which for the most part gives the impression of being watched.

Garage and parking courts are a fairly common feature across the Borough, many of which are in a poor state of repair. They are enclosed by the garages themselves and timber or palisade fencing and brick walls, which create an oppressive environment. They are often remotely located and do not lend themselves to natural surveillance, presenting an uninviting place to be. Furthermore the environment has become neglected as a result, with garages in a poor state of repair, with many appearing to be unused. This is particularly evident in The Avenues (CAN 3A).

The more sporadic areas within the Borough have a mix of surveillance. Those that have development adjacent to well used roads, benefit from further natural surveillance from motorists. There is not the sense of remoteness or isolation as a result. Those that are located along unmade roads have strong enclosure that effectively eliminates any form of natural surveillance, which creates a sense of isolation and remoteness.

Within the commercial and shopping areas a high proportion of the properties have roller shutters to their frontages and CCTV is evident in some cases.

It should be noted that a number of pedestrian footpaths are narrow in width and highly enclosed, often running long stretches, which creates the perception of being an unsafe place to be.

The Borough has an undulating topography, with the levels changes being minimal in places, but significant in other parts. The changes in levels result in views, some of which are impressive, but many provide views to other areas, with no clear indication of how to reach these areas. It should also be noted that the changes in levels, particularly the significant ones, create barriers to the use and access of these areas.

The public realm associated with the blocks of flats in the Borough mainly have one entrance in and out and are open in their layout. Some low lying vegetation is provided to soften the appearance of these areas in some cases. In most instances the areas are overlooked from most directions by the flats themselves and neighbouring residential development. This is considered to be a good approach to such development.

Vandalism is not prevalent in the Borough, only limited pockets exist within a number of the study areas and within town centre and commercial areas. This takes the form of graffiti and damage to fences in the most part, with some damage to the rear of commercial properties which are accessed by rear service roads, and the previously identified garage and parking courts.

The public open spaces and recreation grounds within Local Authority ownership are easily accessible in most cases, however there are a number of uneven surfaces in, and a number of the pitches and general open spaces were waterlogged. Furthermore some are isolated or fully enclosed, which creates an impression of limited natural surveillance, some with locked barriers and narrow accesses.

It should be noted however that it is evident that many of the children's playgrounds have been recently updated, with new forms of enclosure and new play equipment.

A few historic or information plaques are provided within the Borough, but many of the notable buildings and structures are not promoted.

Overall the Borough's public realm is of an acceptable quality for the most part, however there are clear opportunities to improve it and ensure that it is of a high quality.

Ease of Movement/Permeability

Permeability into and out of the study areas varies considerably across the Borough, particularly to the north and areas within the Borough that are semi-rural in nature. These areas are more isolated and have only limited access in and out. Furthermore within these areas the nature of the roads, which are often narrow and unmade make permeability and ease of movement poor (BEN-THUN-HAD 44 & 27).

A number of roads within the Borough are narrow and single track, making them difficult to manoeuvre vehicles. Many are unmade and in a poor state of repair. Most do not provide footpaths and pedestrians have to walk in the road.

Much of the Borough has been developed with linear and grid patterns, interspersed with cul-de-sacs, which are not confined to the specific areas, leading to good permeability into and out of these areas, as well as within. However it should be noted that many of the cul-de-sacs are narrow and have limited or no turning facilities, which results in poor ease of movement.

Parts of the Borough have high concentrations of on street parking which adds to the poor ease of movement for vehicles, and also for pedestrians when vehicles are parked on the footpaths.

Pedestrian routes tend to follow those created by the road layout for many parts of the Borough. However it should be noted that there are a number of areas which have a specific design which creates a number of pedestrian walkways, and which aids in good permeability

Zebra and pelican crossings are provided within the Borough aiding pedestrian movement across many of the busy main roads through the Borough. However these are not always in the most convenient location, for example in close proximity to pedestrian links from 'estates', and are limited in number, thus making these roads significant barriers for pedestrians.

The proliferation of street clutter identified earlier in this report also results in obstacles, which can hinder the movement of pedestrians.

With regard to public transport there is a mainline railway station located centrally within the Borough at Benfleet, however this is still a considerable distance from many residents and employees. Bus routes are mostly restricted to the main routes through the Borough.

The layout of the hazardous installations is dictated by the functionality of the tanks and pipelines. These uses require a high level of security, with no permeability, which is achieved.

Throughout the Borough it is considered that permeability is reasonably good, however ease of movement is considered to be reasonably poor.

Legibility

The Borough is dominated by residential development and as a result it is clear from the outside of most of the study areas what they contain, by the style of building, types of materials and style of enclosure. Many of the schools and shops are located along main routes which form the boundaries between many of the study areas.

The town centres, shopping areas, industrial and trading estates, caravan sites and hazardous installations are also clearly identifiable, using the same criteria as stated above.

Many of the commercial properties have blurred boundaries, particularly to their frontages, where no clearly defined edges are created between the public highway and private forecourts. The industrial sites which are provided with strong means of enclosure clearly identify themselves, however those with no enclosure create blurred edges similar to the commercial properties discussed above. However the buildings themselves are clearly identifiable by the advertisements attached to the front and side of buildings.

It should be noted that at a number of the major road junctions, particularly located in and around the town centres, there is a proliferation of signage, which hinders rather than aid in understanding movement through these areas. This was particularly the case at Tarports.

Many of the residential properties provide clear boundaries between public and private space, resulting in good legibility.

There are a number of open plan estates within the Borough which provide no means of enclosure. In many cases there is a clear distinction between public and private space within these estates, with changes in surface materials and grass areas. However a number of those that provide open grassed areas, and rely on these to also provide front gardens to properties create blurred edges and confusion as to where the public areas end and the private areas begin, such as The Avenues (CAN 3A) and The Rundels (BEN-THUN-HAD 36).

The linear pattern of development found across much of the Borough, which creates grid systems interspersed with cul-de-sacs, coupled with the eclectic mix of dwellings, or regimented estates comprises of the same style of dwelling, results in a high proportion of streets and areas having similar appearances. Therefore at junctions it is unclear whether the roads are through roads or dead-ends. This is further muddled by the poor signage or lack of signage across much of the Borough, and that often the roads take the same name, such as Church Road and London Road, which can be found in both Benfleet and Hadleigh.

This is also the case within parts of the Borough which have a network of pedestrian walkways and green links with parking to the rear. There are no clear signage and linkages, and as a result orientation through these areas can become very confusing for both pedestrians and motorists.

There are limited landmarks, memorable buildings, focal points or distinct features to aid in understanding movement and positioning within areas, particularly within the high proportion of residential development. Those that do exist tend to be along the main routes through the Borough and along the boundaries between the defined study areas.

The Borough has an undulating topography, with the levels changes being minimal in places, but significant elsewhere. The changes in levels result in views, some of which are impressive, but many provide views to other areas, but with no clear indication of how to reach these areas.

Legibility is therefore considered to be poor across a high proportion of the Borough.

Adaptability/Robustness

The roads for a large majority of the Borough are to adoptable standards with infrastructure integrated. This format allows for alternative uses to be accommodated within the area, without major changes to the road or infrastructure network.

However it should be noted that a high proportion of the cul-de-sacs are narrow in places, often with limited or no turning facilities, which would make it difficult or impossible to allow for change in order to accommodate alternative uses. Changes to the single track roads would impact on the attractive semi-rural character that these roads create.

With regard to building forms, the residential dwellings are on plots that mainly adhere to the Council's Adopted space standards. Sub dividing plots or converting single dwellings into flats poses issues in satisfying these standards, and providing acceptable living conditions. Given the nature of such plots there is limited scope to adapt or change their use. Furthermore converting these dwellings into alternative uses poses significant issues with regard to the impact on residential amenity.

The school buildings would appear to be in generally good condition, in regular shapes, and lend themselves to subdivision, adaption, alteration or conversion to alternative uses or residential uses.

Many of the parades of shops resemble blocks of terraced houses, some with residential development already above. These lend themselves to conversion to residential use. Alternatively the existing smaller units could be converted into larger units and larger units could be converted into smaller units to suit demand.

It should also be noted that a number of the buildings used for non-residential use located within the residential area were formerly residential dwellings and as such could revert to such a use.

A number of the non-residential buildings are prefabricated or temporary in nature which are not considered suitable for subdivision, adaption, alteration or conversion. Furthermore whilst some of the non-residential buildings may be suitable for such changes, there are many that are old and in a poor state of repair and concern is raised over the condition of these buildings and whether they could withstand subdivision, adaption and/or conversion. This is particularly evident in Manor and Charfleets trading estates (BEN-THUN-HAD 45 and CAN 6).

It should be noted that a high proportion of the extensions and alterations to the rear of the commercial properties such as shops vary considerably in the size and construction and caution should be paid to their ability to accommodate subdivision, conversion, adaptation and alteration.

Given the high proportion of residential development in the Borough the impact of any changes of use would need to be assessed against the residential amenities of the surrounding dwellings.

The majority of the recreation grounds and large public open spaces have the opportunities to cater for alternative recreational and leisure uses.

It should be noted that the status of the listed buildings contained within the Borough could severely restrict the ability to alter, extend or change the use of these buildings.

Diversity/Variety

Given the high proportion of residential development across the Borough introducing alternative uses into these areas poses significant issues with regard to the impact on residential amenity. Alternative uses would need to be sensitive to such issues.

Furthermore as discussed above subdividing plots or converting single dwelling units into flats poses issues in providing adequate living conditions for existing and new residents.

The subdivision or conversion of the larger dwellings on larger plots within the Borough would not pose significant issues in satisfying the space standards, however the more spacious nature of this layout it is not considered that a more compact form of development would be appropriate to the characteristics of this area.

Within the town centres and shopping areas there is a wide variety of uses, including retail, financial, food, leisure and medical services, and as such there is scope to broaden this variety.

Diversity and variety can also be introduced as a result of subdivision, adaption, alteration or conversion as discussed above, provided the buildings can withstand such changes and the alternative uses are compatible with the surrounding uses.

Recommendations

The assessments of the study areas identified a number of trends and issues across the borough, in respect of consideration against the 7 urban design objectives.

The following points are recommended for consideration when developing the New Local Plan and other Local Development Framework documents, in order to ensure that those matters identified are addressed. These focus around the themes of:

- Built form
- Public realm
- Visual aids
- Natural environment

Built form

Planning policies should seek to ensure that all development achieves high quality sustainable design and contributes positively to its locality. In particular the assessments identified there is a need to address the following:

- Quality of design and use of materials
- Respect local distinctiveness, but also embrace innovation
- Education against bad permitted development
- Improve means of enclosure – materials & design
- Alternative solutions for on & off street parking
- Alternative solutions for corner plots
- Retain & promote strong building lines & symmetry
- Crime prevention
- Sustainability

Public realm

Planning policies should seek the comprehensive development of public realm enhancements for the borough. The assessments highlighted that the following need to be addressed:

- Special attention within town centres and employment areas
- Co-ordinated approach to provision of:
 - street furniture
 - landscaping
 - infrastructure and services
 - palette of materials
 - public art
- Development of public realm strategies
- Reduce clutter
- External appearance of buildings, including ‘shop’ fronts

Visual aids

Planning policies should seek to improve legibility throughout the borough by the provision of high quality visual aids. The assessments indicated that the following should be addressed:

- Improve Advertisements – design, siting & materials
- Reduce clutter & avoid proliferation
- Introduce focal points, landmarks, distinct features, local reference points
- Appearance & promotion of historic assets

Natural environment

Planning policies should aim to increase the quality and accessibility of the natural environment throughout the borough. The assessments highlights the following should be addressed:

- Access & quality of public open space
- Appropriate mix of soft & hard landscaping
- Use of landscaping schemes
- Inclusion of native species suitable to the location & climatic conditions
- Appropriate growth habits
- Incorporating Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDS)
- Promoting biodiversity

References

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- Planning Policy Statement 1 (PPS1): Delivering Sustainable Development. (ODPM 2005)
- Planning Policy Statement 3 (PPS3): Housing. (CLG 2006)
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- Better Places to Live By Design: A Companion Guide to PPG3 (DETR / CABE 2001)
- Urban Design Compendium 1. (English Partnerships & the Housing Corporation September 2007)
- Urban Design Compendium 2 – Delivering Quality Places. (English Partnerships & the Housing Corporation September 2007)
- Building for Life 12 (CABE 2012)
- Essex Design Guide (Essex County Council 2005)
- Urban Place Supplement (Essex County Council 2009)
- Design Review: How CABE evaluates quality in architecture and urban design (CABE July 2006)
- Creating Master Plans: Understanding the Place (CABE)
- Planning for Places: Delivering good design through Core Strategies (CABE November 2009)
- Protecting Design Quality in Planning (CABE August 2003)
- English Partnerships / Housing Corporation (2000)
- Towards an Urban Renaissance (Urban Task Force June 1999)
- Towards a Stronger Urban Renaissance (Urban Task Force 2005)
- Design Review: Principles and Practice (CABE November 2009)
- Character and Identity – Townscape and Heritage Appraisals in Housing Market Renewal Areas. (English Heritage / CABE November 2008)
- Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals. (English Heritage August 2005)
- Typical Character Area Appraisal. (Tunbridge Wells Borough Council April 2009)
- Residential Character Appraisal – Version 2 Evidence Base. (Croydon Council February 2010)
- Toolkit Project, Draft Notes & Questionnaire – Central (City & University) Conservation Area. (Oxford City Council, English Heritage, Oxford Preservation Trust 2009)

APPENDICES AVAILABLE SEPARATELY ON REQUEST