

General Design Principles

Introduction

This supplementary planning document provides general advice on designing new development proposals, covering both residential and commercial developments. It is aimed at applicants and their agents, neighbours and other members of the public.

By its nature, this Note can only be general in its approach although the Council hopes it covers most eventualities.

The Council's planning policy is set out in the adopted Core Strategy and Allocations Plan. The guidelines in this Note set out the key considerations which the Council will apply in coming to a view as to whether an individual application is in line with the Council's policy, or not. But they are not a set of hard and fast rules, and should not be taken as such; they are without prejudice to any decision the Council may make on any application submitted. All applications are judged against relevant provisions in the Council's Core Strategy (see below), Allocations Plan, relevant national policy, this guidance note, and the individual circumstances and considerations which may apply in each case.

Applicants can obtain further advice from the Development Management Section of the Development and Regeneration Department if they consider that their proposals do not fall within the general guidelines provided, or if there are special circumstances which they wish to be taken into account.

An attractive built environment makes an area a pleasant place to live and work. Spaces and places affect the lives of the people who live within them and those who travel to them. The Council has set out, in its Core Strategy, policies aimed at ensuring that new development within Bolton contributes to the creation of an attractive built environment, that it is locally distinctive and sustainable. The Council strongly encourages the use of skilled and qualified designers at all times. This normally results in better quality development, but can also speed the planning approval process since there is often less need for a lengthy process of negotiating improvements.

The Council expects that architects and designers working within Bolton have design knowledge and skills; however the following key aspects of Urban Design (taken from the HCA Urban Design Compendium) are considered to be a useful starting point and benchmark:

Places for People - For places to be well-used and well-loved, they must be safe, comfortable, varied and attractive.

Enrich the Existing - New development should enrich the qualities of existing urban places, but need not simply copy its surroundings.

Make Connections - Places need to be easy to get to and be integrated physically and visually with their surroundings.

Work with the Landscape - Places that strike a balance between the natural and man-made environment and utilise each site's intrinsic resources are more sustainable.

Mix Uses and Forms - Stimulating, enjoyable and convenient places meet a variety of demands from the widest possible range of users, amenities and social groups.

Manage the Investment - For projects to be developable and well cared for they must be economically viable, well managed and maintained.

Design for Change - New development needs to be flexible enough to respond to future changes in use, lifestyle and demography.

Section 1 – General planning principles

Policy Context.

The National Planning Policy Framework (March 2012) sets out the government's planning policies for England and is a material consideration in planning decisions. At the heart of the NPPF is a presumption in favour of sustainable development i.e. that which seeks economic, social and environmental gains through positive improvements in the quality of the built environment, natural and historic environment, as well as in people's quality of life.

Locally, Bolton's Core Strategy sets out policies to guide development within the Borough. Policies CG1, CG2 and CG3 address the need to build well for the future in a sustainable way.

The following guidance is designed to inform and shape new development within the Borough and should be read in conjunction with the policies outlined above.

- **Character and sense of place**

As a town, Bolton is characterised by its values:

Open – friendly, welcoming and inclusive;
Colourful – characterful, distinctive and interesting; and
Sound – decent, reliable and trustworthy.

And the Council wishes to see these reflected, where possible, through physical change and development. As such, the Council is keen to see innovative and contemporary architecture and design, where this is thoughtfully incorporated into the development's setting.

The different neighbourhoods and streets within the town have distinct characters which are a unique combination of their buildings, open spaces and street patterns and the way they are used. So for example the spaces around new dwellings should be related to the character of the existing area and the table contained at Section 3 sets out interface distances which will help to achieve this.

In the rural parts of the borough the creation of new gardens, access, parking and landscaping when existing buildings are converted can have a significant impact on the character of the landscape. The Council will expect such conversions to include a restricted curtilage to preserve the openness of the landscape. Native landscaping will also be expected to further ensure such development does not appear visually intrusive.

- **Legibility.**

It is easier to find your way around and to feel safe and comfortable in a place if you can understand it. New development should maintain the hierarchy of street widths and functions and respect the hierarchy of existing buildings in scale, height and function and ensure that entrances are welcoming and easy to find.

- **Well-designed buildings.**

Buildings that are well-designed contribute to the quality of the street scene and provide good living, working and social environments for their occupiers and the community within which they are located. The Council welcomes proposals for contemporary buildings which are of their age as long as they respect the streets and spaces within which they sit.

- **Adaptability and future maintenance.**

New development should be designed so as to be flexible and adaptable, and able to be easily converted or altered to suit different uses or occupants' needs. It is critical that any new development is well-maintained to protect its value and its contribution to the street scene and this can be done by proper consideration of the use of external facing materials that suit the environment and climate.

The Council wishes to encourage sustainable design and construction. Building materials should be sustainably sourced from local merchants within the North West. Materials which are sourced from outside of the UK are not encouraged as they hold a high carbon transport content. The re-use of materials from previous developments is encouraged and supported. Recycled products should be given priority over raw materials especially for hardcore and sub-structure aggregates. For further information on Sustainable Design and Construction access the Council's Supplementary Planning Document online at:

<http://www.bolton.gov.uk/sites/DocumentCentre/Documents/SDC%20SPD.pdf>

- **Community Safety and Inclusion.**

Good quality buildings and townscapes are those where the occupiers feel safe and secure. Applicants are expected to demonstrate through their Design and Access Statements how crime prevention measures have been considered throughout their proposals and how the needs of disabled people have been incorporated.

Buildings and spaces should be designed with natural surveillance as a precautionary aid towards crime prevention to ensure that footpaths, open spaces and parking areas are overlooked. Footpaths should be wide, well-lit and not obscured by planting and all planting should be kept in good order to avoid creating 'hidden areas' or obscuring doors or windows. Lighting should be used carefully to illuminate public and semi-private areas and provide footpaths which are short and direct. In most circumstances weldmesh fencing should be used on boundaries for both visual and security reasons.

Applicants are advised to take crime and safety into account at the inception stage of design using the 'Designing out Crime' approach promoted by the Greater Manchester Police Crime Prevention Unit.

In circumstances where natural surveillance cannot be readily achieved or where it is limited, applicants, again with advice from the Police, should consider additional measures to be incorporated into any development such as secure access arrangements to buildings used and occupied by more than one owner or tenant and this could be in the form of:

- Security cameras;
- Secure door access mechanisms and;
- Suitable lighting.

Ease of movement.

New development within Bolton must be designed to facilitate the efficient movement of people between their homes, work, schools and leisure activities and support a mode shift towards public transport. Detailed guidance is contained within SPD Transport, Accessibility and Road Safety adopted 21st October 2013. Applicants are expected to demonstrate through their Transport Assessment that they have considered the safe and convenient movement of people through a variety of travel choices.

- **Quality Public Realm.**

An attractive public realm can enhance peoples' quality of life and the perception of a place. New development must, therefore, create a high quality and stimulating public realm which prioritises the needs of people using the space. The long-term success of the public realm rests not only on good design and good levels of natural surveillance but also on-going management and maintenance. The Council will, therefore, look for a robust management and maintenance plan to be approved as part of any development proposal.

Section 2 - Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas.

The Council's aim for listed buildings is to protect them and their setting. The starting point for the exercise of listed building control is always recognition of the great importance of protecting buildings of architectural and historic interest from unnecessary demolition and inappropriate alteration. The setting is often an essential part of a building's character. Historic buildings can be robbed of much of their interest and townscape value if they become isolated from their surroundings. When planning applications for development in the vicinity of listed buildings are being considered, careful appraisal is required to ensure that the character is not harmed. Applications for development which by its location or design, have an adverse effect on setting will normally be refused. The visual quality of open spaces around a listed building often contributes to its setting. Development which would lead to the loss of any open space which fulfils a valuable role in the townscape will be resisted. So too would development which would obstruct important views of and from listed buildings. Management of these important open spaces should be sympathetic to the character of historic buildings.

The Council has prepared and will keep up-to-date a number of Conservation Area Character Studies which set out the unique characteristics of these areas. When assessing applications for development within a Conservation Area, reference will be made to the Character Studies when forming a view on the impact on character and sense of place. The other general guidance outlined in this document will also be applicable to developments within Conservation Areas.

Section 3 – Topic specific planning guidance.

1. Distances between dwellings.

The following table sets out recommended interface distances aimed at ensuring that the spaces around new dwellings are related to the character of the existing area.

From	To	Distance	Height/levels addition
Elevation containing Main window to main room (single or two storey)	Elevation containing Main window to main room (single or two storey)	21 metres	Plus 3 metres for each additional storey or equivalent levels difference
Elevation containing Main window to main room (single or two storey)	Two storey elevation (Blank wall or containing obscure glazed window)	13.5 metres	Ditto
Elevation containing Main window to main room (single storey)	Elevation containing obscure glazed window or blank wall (single storey)	9 metres	Ditto
Elevation containing Main window to main room (single or two storey) Oblique view	Elevation containing Main window to main room (single or two storey)	17 metres	Ditto
Private amenity space		50 square metres	

These distances relate to conventional housing layouts, where houses are likely to relate to each other in reasonably standard fashion. In most cases, these interface distances remain a useful rule of thumb in taking account of a new development's relationship with the existing, surrounding development layout, which may well have changed over the years, and which may not have been designed in accordance with this guidance.

As such, the distances set out should not be read as a minimum standard, but simply as advice on what would represent ideal layout design. The Council will take them into account along with other factors such as any difference in levels that might exist between neighbouring properties and the availability of other screening measures (which may include fencing, walling or planting, or using high level or obscure glazed windows where appropriate).

Changes in ground level may contribute, in certain circumstances, to an effect similar to high buildings being located near lower buildings. For example, in a situation where a development is on a higher level than existing dwellings the impact a two storey development would have may be greater than if the site were flat. This may mean that in some cases the Council will ask for more separation than indicated above.

A reasonable degree of privacy within their home remains a cherished objective for most people, particularly as far as their lounge, dining room, and main bedroom(s) are concerned. New developments should not have an overbearing or overly dominant effect on adjoining dwellings, or on other sensitive uses. Given the nature of much suburban development it is likely that some overlooking from upstairs rear windows into and across neighbouring garden or other amenity space will inevitably occur. Conservatories may also be less private because of their open aspect.

In practice, this can be achieved by considering two key points: maintaining appropriate distances between main room windows and elevations in neighbouring properties; and avoiding excessive loss of natural light into principal rooms by limiting the scale of buildings which are immediately adjacent. However it should be borne in mind that the urban areas of Bolton, where most new development is expected to be located, are relatively densely settled and new development or redevelopment in these circumstances will inevitably represent a compromise on what might be achieved on a greenfield site with no constraints on space.

Principal rooms are those rooms within the dwelling which are the focus of the main functions of living within that dwelling and comprise the following:

- Lounge
- Dining room (or dining kitchen, if no separate dining room can be provided)
- the two largest bedrooms

Main room windows are by simple definition the window to each principal room which provide the main aspect from that room or are the largest. They will generally be the windows facing the front/rear of the dwelling; in designing an extension it is wise to avoid placing main room windows in a side elevation as they will have a significant impact on the privacy of adjoining residents unless they can be screened. Each principal room can only have one main room window; all other windows within the same room are classed as secondary windows. In a combined dining kitchen the main window will usually be that which serves the dining area. However, in long rooms which have two aspects (e.g. through lounge/diners), both windows **may** be defined as main windows.

Balconies

Because they are generally open, balconies have a greater impact on the privacy and amenity of neighbouring properties, as when used they give greater opportunities for views into gardens and rooms of adjacent dwellings. In such cases balconies are likely to be unacceptable. In order to counter this, it may be possible for an applicant to provide for a suitable screen barrier along the perimeter of the balcony adjacent to a neighbouring dwelling to maintain their privacy. Such details would be controlled by the imposition of planning conditions for their installation and retention.

Amenity space standards for flats/apartments

The following amenity space standards will apply for flat/apartment developments. Private sitting-out areas should take the form of either a minimum balcony area of 5 sq. meters for each flat or for an adequately screened communal area with a minimum provision of 18 sq. metres per flat.

2. Working from Home.

If a material change of use to a dwelling is proposed then the following issues will be considered by the Council in terms of the impact on the character of the area:

- Noise, and
- Nuisance,
- Traffic generation including deliveries and
- The need for advertisements.

3. Conversion to self-contained flats and bedsits, construction of self-contained annexes.

Where an external alteration to a property is proposed any new features should complement the existing character of the building and the area. Where conversions are acceptable in principle, they should respect the need to ensure a reasonable standard of amenity for both occupants and neighbouring properties. Applicants should minimise the intrusion upon the privacy of adjoining residents, both in the same building and in adjoining properties.

Applicants wishing to convert properties into flats and bedsits should provide an area of screened private open space for the use of residents. This should include adequate storage areas for, and easy access to, bins and clothes drying areas. Any existing private open space should be retained. Applications will be judged on their impact on road safety in accordance with policy S1 of the Core Strategy. Applications to create self-contained “granny annexes” will be judged against other Relevant Legislation and a restrictive residency condition will be imposed.

The Building Regulations 1985 will need to be complied with around matters of sound insulation standards, air-borne and impact noise and use of open space adjacent to windows to habitable rooms.

All HMOs within Bolton must meet certain standards in relation to fire safety, amenities and room sizes and will also be subject to assessment under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System, introduced by the Housing Act 2004. Managers of HMOs must also comply with the Management of Houses in Multiple Occupation (England) Regulations 2006. Please contact the Housing Standards Team on 01204 333333 for further information on these requirements.

4. Waste and Recycling Storage

Applications for the various residential forms of development including houses, flats, houses in multiple-occupation (new build and conversions) will be expected to make provision for storage, within the site(s), for waste collection/recycling bins as appropriate. Such facilities should be appropriately sited and screened. Failure to provide such facilities may result in applications being refused.

More detailed guidance and advice can be found in the Bolton Council document ‘Waste and Recycling Storage, Planning, and Collection Guidance for Houses, Flats, Houses of Multiple Occupancy, New Builds, and Conversions.’

5. Shop fronts and security shutters.

New/replacement shop fronts should respect the character and appearance of the building and wider street scene, giving attention to use of materials and retention/introduction of features associated with good quality shop front design, such as cornice, pilasters, stall riser, window proportion, corbels, access and fascia. Shop front designs should:

- Frame the shop window with visual and functional elements;
- Respect the main building and not dominate its architecture;
- Avoid linking two buildings with one fascia;
- Have individual distinctive identities that contribute to the diversity of the street scene;
- Utilise three dimensional qualities and recessing;
- Use good quality materials and finishes.

Where a good quality shop front exists that makes a positive contribution to the special characteristics of a Conservation Area, it should normally be retained rather than replaced. Traditional shop fronts or features on listed buildings should also be retained where they preserve the special architectural interest of the building.

Internal grilles are the Council's preferred type of security shutter. Applicants should first look at these before opting for external shutters.

Shutters should be of an open grille design, which allows clear visibility into the shop when down. They should not present a blank or dead frontage. Shutters should not cover the entire shop frontage and should not normally extend over the stall riser. Roller shutters will not be permitted on listed buildings and only in very special circumstances in conservation areas.

6. Floodlighting.

The Council will assess applications for floodlighting in terms of the impact of light pollution on the character and landscape of the area and the impact on the amenity of adjoining uses, particularly dwellings, and will look to restrict hours of use of the lighting as set out in the table below. Further control may be imposed by applying *maximum* Lux levels as conditions unless technical specifications can show otherwise that there will not be any undue intrusion from the installations.

Suggested condition wording regarding Lux Levels;

"Before the development hereby permitted commences a scheme shall be agreed with the Local Planning Authority which specifies the provision to be made for the control of light emanating from all floodlit areas. The scheme should be kept to the BS/EN standards set out in "Lighting Guide 4: Sports Lighting" (SLL, 2006) and shall ensure:-

- a) The illumination of ball courts should be kept to the minimum necessary.
- b) The beam angle of any lights directed towards any potential observer should be kept below 70 degrees. Spill shields shall also be fitted.
- c) Lights are angled and positioned to ensure no light spillage (zero LUX) at the elevations of nearby residential properties.
- d) Lights shall be designed to be asymmetrical beams that permit front glazing to be kept at or near parallel to the surface of play areas.

The scheme shall be implemented and retained as approved prior to the floodlights first being brought into use.

Reason

To safeguard the amenity and character of the area and to safeguard the living conditions of nearby residents."

Table of distance between floodlighting and residential property and suggested hours restrictions

Distance/Metres	Suggested Hours
0 – 19	Seek alternative siting due to detrimental impact upon residential amenity.
20 – 34	09.00 and 21.00 Monday to Friday, 09.00 and 18.00 Saturdays and 09.00 and 17.00 Sundays for a temporary period of one year in order to monitor the impact upon residential properties nearby.
35 – 50	09.00 and 21.00 Monday to Friday, 09.00 and 18.00 Saturdays and 09.00 and 17.00 Sundays.

7. Signs and advertisements.

Certain advertisements can be erected without the need to obtain consent from the Council, and discussions with planners in the Development Management Team at an early stage in the design process will establish whether a formal application to display an advertisement is required. Nevertheless, regard paid to the guidance given in this planning guidance note will avoid unnecessary delay and expense should an application for consent to display an advertisement be necessary.

In determining any application for consent the Council will have regard to the appearance and amenity of the locality and public safety however, existing advertisements may be disregarded in assessing its characteristics. In assessing the effect of the sign on the amenity of the area the Council will not only take account of matters which may detract from the quality of the neighbourhood but also of factors which may be to the advantage of amenities, such as whether a sign adds appropriate colour and interest to a drab area or screens an eyesore.

All advertisements should respect the character of their surroundings and any display should not be obtrusive when viewed by passers-by. In particular when advertisements are displayed alongside highways, they should be related to the scale of surrounding buildings and when displayed on buildings they should have regard to the symmetry and architectural features of the building upon which they are sited and be designed and positioned so as to be seen as an integral feature of the building.

Successful design will always rely on the sympathetic handling of scale, materials and detail. Any sign should be of an appropriate size, designed and sited sympathetically in relation to the building. Consent will generally not be granted for fascia or name boards to be sited above first floor windowsill level. Where commercial uses are situated at first floor level, advertisements should be in the form of traditional simple lettering painted on windows. In other cases restrained advertising such as individual fret cut letters non-illuminated other than by spotlight may be acceptable. Signs at upper levels may be acceptable on set-piece, multi-occupancy centres or shops with an unusual proportion of floor space to frontage.

Although in many commercial areas more latitude can be exercised and it may be acceptable for advertisements to be more dominant, much greater care should be taken in Conservation Areas or where buildings are of considerable architectural or historical merit. In such cases traditional detailing should be maintained, for example, where fascia signs and name boards are surrounded by friezes or cornices these should be preserved. Edge mouldings to fascia signs can, moreover, give a more pleasing appearance than a simple flat board and the use of natural materials is advised.

Conditions will be used as appropriate to control levels of illumination for both externally and internally illuminated signage.

Care must always be taken when signs are positioned close to highways or traffic signs to ensure that their siting does not obscure visibility or distract the attention of users of the highway. Nor should the colours of advertisements or their illumination obscure or reduce the clarity of any traffic sign. Particular attention should be paid where advertisements are sited at points where drivers need to take exceptional care, such as at road junctions.

General Note

Advertisements should never be sited on the highway itself, including footpaths. Free standing sandwich-boards on the pavements which can hinder the free passage of pedestrians are liable to be removed by the highway authority.

Useful sources of information –
CABE,
Manual for Streets,
HCA Design Compendium,
Code for Sustainable Homes