

Chapter 9: Achieving Well Designed Places

9.1 The Local Plan requires all new development to achieve the highest standards of design. Good design is essential for creating attractive, sustainable, safe, and accessible places. It enhances the public realm, supports healthier lifestyles, fosters civic pride, enables places to thrive and is central to the Borough's vision.

9.2 In line with the NPPF, good design is a key component of sustainable development. It should be informed by a thorough analysis of local character and context to co-create coherent places, rather than relying on arbitrary standards. Design policies should encourage innovation while responding to local history and identity and should also conserve significance and minimise harm.

9.3 Design Codes and Masterplans will establish the vision and key development parameters for areas earmarked for growth or enhancement. They will provide additional certainty for applicants and support effective community engagement.

9.4 All proposals must demonstrate a sound understanding of the site and respond positively to applicable urban design principles in local and national policy and guidance, including the *Essex Design Guide*, the *NPPF*, the *National Design Guide* and the *National Model Design Code*. Where a Basildon Borough Design Code is adopted in the future, development, including any forthcoming Neighbourhood Plan design codes, will be required to align with its principles.

9.5 Additionally, where sites may be in multiple ownership or have more than one developer involved, a consortium approach is advised. This should be facilitated by a memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed by all parties; to provide certainty for the Council and other stakeholders that a proposed scheme will be developed and implemented as consented. The Basildon First Charter provides a guide for interested parties as to the content and wording for the MoU.

POLICY D1: Design and Place Shaping Principles

All development will be compatible with its surroundings and should consider the context of the site and surrounding area. Proposals should:

1. Respond appropriately to the local patterns of development, including street plots and blocks, spaces between buildings and boundary treatments; building form, including size, scale, massing, density, details and materials; topography; existing natural, historic and built assets and features that contribute positively to local character and distinctiveness; existing landmarks and focal points; and existing views into, out of, or through the site;
2. Make effective and efficient use of land and buildings, through the arrangement of development plots and the design, layout, and orientation of buildings on site;
3. Provide active frontages and positive reciprocal relationships between activity inside the buildings and outside in the public realm to generate liveliness and interest;
4. Ensure buildings will be durable, flexible, and adaptable over their planned lifespan, taking into account potential future social, economic, technological, and environmental needs, through the structure, layout and design of buildings and places;
5. Use appropriate, high-quality materials which reinforce or enhance local distinctiveness, with consideration given to texture, colour, pattern, and durability;
6. Optimise permeability and legibility for pedestrians and cyclists, and avoid barriers to movement, through careful consideration of street layouts and access routes that are attractive and aligned with peoples' movement patterns and desire lines in the area;
7. Provide well-designed boundary treatments, that reflect the function and character of the development and its surroundings;
8. Provide well-designed accessible new public realm with high-quality landscaping (hard and soft), that integrates multifunctional Green Infrastructure (GI) and nature-based solutions as critical design elements to support climate resilience, wider environmental net gains and the co-benefits of urban planting, street furniture and public art;
9. Create safe, accessible, and inclusive environments;
10. Minimise the use of non-renewable resources through design in accordance with Policies CC1, CC3, CC4 and CC5;
11. Address community safety issues, to reduce the incidence of crime and anti-social activity with reference to 'Secured by Design;'

All new development shall provide appropriate and well-designed recycling and waste storage within the plot of the building in which the property is located, or a communal store where the development relates to more than one property, in accordance with the Council's waste strategy.

Reasoned Justification

9.6 The *National Design Guide* provides an overarching framework for design, with detailed guidance provided in the accompanying *National Model Design Code*. These illustrate how well-designed places that are 'beautiful, enduring and successful' can be achieved in practice. Significant positive weight will be given to development which reflects this Government guidance, which promotes high levels of sustainability, or which helps to raise the standard of design more generally. The Council also encourages developers to consider local design principles set out in the *Essex Design Guide*. This requirement for high quality design will apply to public and private buildings across all scales of development, as well as to infrastructure projects.

9.7 The design of a building or extension can have a significant impact on the overall appearance of a development. The detailing, including use of materials, design features and layout of windows and doors are all important considerations to creating well-designed buildings, extensions, and places.

9.8 The layout and design of a development are important in creating a safe environment where people are comfortable to live, work, visit and study in. Large-volume buildings such as industrial warehouses, retail superstores and agricultural sheds have visual effects, even where the development brings economic benefits. New buildings, and extensions or alterations to buildings, should be proportionate in size and scale in relation to existing development or the host building so that they are in keeping with their surroundings. The surroundings may include the immediately adjacent buildings, the street scene, or the wider character and appearance of the area.

9.9 The planning system can play an important role in creating healthy communities. This can include promoting new development that provides opportunities for healthy living through the encouragement of walking and cycling and provision of open space. Sport England's '*Active Design*' provides further guidance on this.

9.10 Measures to design out crime should be integral to development proposals and considered early in the design process, taking into account the principles contained in guidance such as the *Secured by Design Scheme* published by the Police. This will ensure development proposals provide adequate protection, do not compromise good design, do not shift vulnerabilities elsewhere, and are cost-effective.

9.11 To improve inclusivity across Basildon and address the underrepresentation of teenage girls, young women, and gender-diverse youth in public spaces, the Council commissioned a report from Social Place (a research, engagement, and design specialist), Make Space for Girls (a national campaigning charity), and Bar'N'Bus (an Essex-based charity delivering professional, community-based youth work). Research shows that standard outdoor provisions, such as multi-use games areas (MUGAs) and skateparks, are overwhelmingly dominated by boys and young men (92% and 84%, respectively), leaving others without welcoming or inclusive spaces. This report offers inspiration for activating underutilised areas in Basildon through inclusive, creative, and community-led approaches. The findings reflect the views of 11 participants aged 12 to 14

who identified as girls or young women. Participation varied across the sessions, with a core group of three attending all workshops.

9.12 Many developments will require bin and/or cycle storage. Well-designed developments consider the provision of these facilities at the outset so they can be incorporated into the design of the scheme. In order to protect the appearance of the street scene these features are best incorporated into the building envelope. Where this cannot be achieved, they should be positioned where they will not have a negative impact on the street scene as well as being attractive and properly screened. All bin and storage areas should be in convenient and easily accessible locations for residents and refuse operatives. Some developments are considering underground bin store solutions; however, these are not appropriate on classified roads or in locations where roads/pavements would be blocked at collection and need to be serviced on-site.

Policy Links

- SG1 – Growth Needs
- EMP3 - Changes of Use of Employment Land or Premises
- EMP6 - Locations for Employment Development
- HOU1 - Size, Type and Quality of New Housing
- HOU2 - Affordable Housing
- HOU3 - Specialist Housing for Older People
- Rx – Ensuring the Vitality of Town Centres
- CC1 - Responding to Climate Change
- CC3 - Water Efficiency and Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS)
- CC4 - Operational Energy and Carbon (Net Zero) in Homes and Buildings
- CC5 - Embodied Carbon and Circular Economy in Homes and Buildings
- D2 - Major Developments - Design
- D3 - Design in Smaller Scale Projects
- D4 - Advertisements
- STAT1 - Strategic Transport
- INF4 - Digital Connectivity

Evidence Links

- Essex Design Guide (2018)
- National Design Guide (2021)
- National Model Design Code (2021)
- Make Space For Girls
- Secured by Design

POLICY D2: Major Developments - Design

The Council will require all major developments to be of high-quality built form and urban design, to reflect the following principles:

1. Respect the natural environment, biodiversity, and amenity interests through the provision of diverse green spaces and urban planting that delivers co-benefits.
2. Respond positively to local character and context to preserve and enhance the quality of existing communities. Proposals are expected to have regard to the *Essex Design Guide*, relevant Government guidance, and, when adopted, the *Basildon Borough Design Code*. Proposals that fail to demonstrate high-quality design consistent with national policy, local design policies, or the Code will be refused;
3. Have a positive visual impact, being visually coherent, interesting, and attractive;
4. Create well-connected places that prioritise cycling, walking, wheeling, and public transport services above the use of the private car;
5. Where possible, provide a varied mix of land uses, densities and building typologies, and arrange them to support place shaping and sitewide legibility.
6. Minimise energy and water consumption and provide climate resilience through site layout and individual building design, with reference to Policy D1 and Policies CC1, CC3, CC4 and CC5;
7. Create attractive, multi-functional, inclusive, overlooked, and well-maintained public realm, and enhance the setting of existing public realm following on from the principles set out in Policy D1;
8. Provide streets and spaces that are overlooked, active and promote inclusive access. Where parking is provided, it must be well integrated as part of the overall design;
9. Public and private amenity space must be clearly defined, safe, accessible, inclusive and secure, and provide opportunities for social interaction and recreation that support the health and wellbeing of communities. Public amenity spaces should incorporate natural surveillance to enhance security wherever site circumstances allow;
10. Provide good quality access to public open space and contribute to green infrastructure in line with the *Essex Design Guide* and *Essex Green Infrastructure Standards*. Open space should include good quality provision for play and recreation that is safe, inclusive, and accessible to all age groups. SuDS may form part of the green infrastructure and open space network where they are designed for multi-functional use; however, sufficient usable open space must be provided beyond land required for SuDS;
11. Retain existing trees and other landscape features where appropriate and explore opportunities for new tree planting in compliance with policy NE1(5);

12. Provide opportunities to promote healthy living and to improve health and wellbeing, including community gardens with food growing;

13. Ensure buildings address the street and provide a suitable level of enclosure to surrounding streets and spaces;

14. In suitable locations provide temporary use of sites and premises for cultural activities, particularly in locations where they can help to animate the public realm, and the provision of public art will be supported.

15. Major developments will submit a Green and Blue Infrastructure (GBI) and/or Landscape Plans at planning application stage that:

    a. maps existing green and blue infrastructure assets;

    b. illustrates proposed new GI and SuDS features;

    c. demonstrates integration of Biodiversity Net Gain;

    d. identifies opportunities to contribute to Local Nature Recovery Strategy priorities; and

    e. secures their long-term stewardship through a Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (LEMP).

ALLOCATION-WIDE MASTERPLAN AND DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK COORDINATION

16. Masterplans are the preferred mechanism for securing coordinated and comprehensive development. Where proposals come forward in advance of an approved masterplan, this position must be clearly justified.

17. Allocation-wide masterplans will normally be developed through a consortium approach ahead of the initial application, secured through a Section 106 Legal Agreement, and reflected in conditioned Design Codes for both the initial and subsequent applications. Applicants will be expected to demonstrate proportionate and effective coordination with other landowners and promoters. Where the intentions of other landowners are unclear, applicants must demonstrate that their proposals would not prejudice delivery of the wider allocation and that the remainder can still come forward in accordance with the Vision and Core Principles of the relevant site allocation policy.

18. Where development of part of an allocation is agreed to proceed in advance of, or without, an approved masterplan, the proposal must not prejudice the development potential of the wider site. Applicants must demonstrate that the wider development potential would not be compromised; and that the remainder of the allocation can still be delivered in accordance with the Vision and Core Principles of the relevant site allocation policy.

19. Allocation-wide coordination should:

    a. Establish the key layout and

structuring elements of the site, including land uses, movement hierarchies, green and blue infrastructure, access arrangements, and allocation-wide urban design features such as key views and landmarks. It should identify indicative housing densities and the overall amount of development. The masterplan should set out clear thresholds for the physical development of the site to deliver the Site Allocation policies and secure long-term design quality, while retaining flexibility to respond to site-specific constraints.

b. Ensure that existing and proposed individual parcels are physically and functionally connected, including through continuous street and movement networks, integrated green infrastructure, and efficient shared utilities and services where appropriate.

c. Set out the location and phasing of strategic infrastructure, including schools, utilities and community facilities. Development should be delivered in a manner that ensures the timely provision of the necessary supporting infrastructure.

d. Identify the location and phasing of Gypsy and Traveller pitches, where required by Policy HOU4 and the Site Allocation policy.

e. For allocations with multiple land promotors, provide for a coordinated approach to delivery including where appropriate provide a framework for land value equalisation.

20. All subsequent applications must be in accordance with the approved Masterplan / framework. Proposals for part of an allocation must not prejudice the development potential of the wider site and must demonstrate how the remainder can be delivered in line with the aspirations and principles of the relevant site allocation policy and framework.

For other complex and large-scale development proposals not covered by site allocation policies, a masterplan or design code may still be required.

Reasoned Justification

9.13 Major new development must reflect a high quality of urban and architectural design. It must also be functional and viable. Developments will be planned carefully with the use of masterplans and design codes where appropriate. The Council will encourage developers to consider the design principles set out in the Essex Design Guide.

9.14 For allocated sites and land adjacent to allocations, an allocation-wide framework or masterplan is required to ensure development comes forward in a coordinated and comprehensive manner. This is particularly important where site allocations are delivered in phases or by multiple landowners. A framework enables the Council to assess how key design principles will be applied across the whole allocation and ensures that individual parcels are not brought forward in isolation. It also supports the timely and integrated delivery of strategic infrastructure and, where applicable, Gypsy and Traveller pitches. This approach is essential to optimise land use, support sustainable living, and secure high-quality placemaking.

9.15 New developments within site allocations providing land for new Education (and EYCC provision) should be designed having regard to the Lead Authority for Educations Essex New Schools Design Principles (2025) in the *Essex Design Guide* and ECC's *Developers Guide to Infrastructure Contributions*.

9.16 Enhancements to the public realm, landscaping measures and attention to architectural detail will be important features that the Council will wish to see included in new major developments. Strategic scale and more local green infrastructure can make a vital contribution to quality of place, biodiversity, and health outcomes. All development affects the public realm: larger developments create new streets and public spaces, whilst smaller proposals affect the appearance of existing spaces. They should do so in a way that achieves a positive impact and reinforces a strong sense of place.

9.17 The NPPF is clear on the important contributions that trees have to the character and quality of urban environments. The addition of trees should maximise visual interest, whilst the choice of tree should maximise canopy coverage for cooling and shade, alleviate surface water drainage and provide biodiversity benefits, whilst enhancing the existing character of the area. The incorporation of such features can form part of new streets, open spaces, and garden areas. Careful consideration should be given to the location, type and management of new trees and soft landscaping to ensure they are appropriate and can be easily maintained. In urban areas trees are particularly important for improving air quality, providing shade, reducing heat in warmer weather and providing important habitats for wildlife. This includes existing and newly planted trees within sites, and as part of the wider public realm.

9.18 Active street frontages should be provided. Overly monolithic or monotonous elevations will not be permitted where they harm townscape quality.

9.19 Bin storage should be discreet and well-integrated within the development. Street clutter should be avoided. Street furniture should positively contribute to the context and function of the space where it is located, without compromising accessibility and movement. Applicants

should refer to the *National Model Design Code* and the *Essex Design Guide* for detailed design guidance.

9.20 Vacant premises can provide opportunities for start-ups and small local businesses, as well as community groups. Meanwhile uses such as pop-up music or art venues, food-growing spaces, and restaurants, can also be used as a way to create social cohesion between the residents of the Borough and plays a role in building strong communities, increasing healthy life outcomes and generating civic pride.

Policy Links

- SG1 – Growth Needs
- EMP3 - Changes of Use of Employment Land or Premises
- EMP6 - Locations for Employment Development
- HOU1 - Size, Type and Quality of New Housing
- HOU2 - Affordable Housing
- HOU3 - Specialist Housing for Older People
- R2 - Development in Basildon Town Centre
- R3 - Primary Shopping Areas (PSA)
- R7 - Ensuring the Vitality of Town Centres
- CC1 - Responding to Climate Change
- CC3 - Water Efficiency and Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS)
- CC4 - Operational Energy and Carbon (Net Zero) in Homes and Buildings
- CC5 - Embodied Carbon and Circular Economy in Homes and Buildings
- D1 - Design and Place Shaping Principles
- HC1 - Health and Well-being Strategy
- HC2 - Open Spaces, Local Green Spaces, Sport and Recreation
- NE1 - Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment
- AQMP1 - Mitigating Air Quality and Wider Environmental Pollution Issues
- AQMP4 - Protecting High Quality Agricultural Land
- STAT1 - Strategic Transport

Evidence Links

- Essex Design Guide (2018)
- National Design Guide (2021)
- National Model Design Code (2021)
- Make Space For Girls

Design on Smaller Scale Projects

9.21 The NPPF expects that local plans should set out a clear design vision and expectations, so that applicants have as much certainty as possible about what is likely to be acceptable.

9.22 Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities. Being clear about design expectations, and how these will be tested, is essential for achieving this. So too is effective engagement between applicants, communities, local planning authorities and other interested parties throughout the process.

9.23 Design proposals should be based on best practice and where this can be demonstrated it will support the desirability of the proposal. Current examples include *Lifetime Neighbourhoods* (DCLG); *Building for a Healthy Life* (Homes England); *Urban Design Compendium* (English Partnerships and The Housing Corporation); *By Design* (DETR & CABE); *Conservation Principles Policies and Guidance* (English Heritage) and the *National Design Guide* (MHCLG), among others.

POLICY D3: Design in smaller scale projects

It is important to plan positively for the achievement of high-quality design for all development proposals. Development proposals will be supported where the design:

1. responds positively to its immediate architectural context and local character, in terms of the use of materials and detailing, scale, proportion, landscape design and the space between buildings;
2. sustains the significance of a heritage asset and/or its setting and the character and appearance of conservation areas;
3. positively contributes to the setting, wider townscape, landscape and views;
4. protects the amenity of current and neighbouring occupiers, whether residential or otherwise;
5. contributes to the function of the area and is safe and accessible;
6. protects and incorporates trees that are desirable for retention; and
7. minimise energy and water consumption and provide climate resilience through site layout and individual building design, with reference to Policy D1 and Policies CC1, CC3, CC4 and CC5.

In addition to the above points, plotland sites should also adhere to the upcoming plotlands SPD.

Reasoned Justification

9.24 It is the responsibility of the Council through the development management process to ensure that new development does not impinge unreasonably on the residential and visual amenities of adjoining residents. These standards will apply to all new residential development, and, where appropriate, other types of development.

9.25 Development which results from the change of, addition to, or the conversion of existing buildings can prolong the useful life of a building, helping to meet the changing needs of its occupiers. However, inappropriate alterations or a high concentration of change can cause harm to the character of a place or to local residential amenity.

9.26 An extension would normally be expected to be subservient to the original building. Stylistically, it would normally be expected to be in keeping with the original building and its context (see policy points above). If a quite different approach to the architectural language of expression is developed, this could be acceptable only if high design quality can be demonstrated.

9.27 When developing plotland sites, proposals must demonstrate compliance with the relevant design principles and have regard to the specific guidance contained within the forthcoming Plotland Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), which will address the distinctive character and appropriate development standards for these sites.

Policy Links

- SG1 – Growth Needs
- EMP3 - Changes of Use of Employment Land or Premises
- HOU1 - Size, Type and Quality of New Housing
- HOU2 - Affordable Housing
- HOU3 - Specialist Housing for Older People
- R2 - Development in Basildon Town Centre
- R3 - Primary Shopping Areas (PSA)
- D1 - Design and Place Shaping Principles
- NE1 - Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment
- GB2 - New Development in the Green Belt
- HE1 - Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment

Evidence Links

- Essex Design Guide (2018)
- National Design Guide (2021)
- National Model Design Code (2021)
- Make Space For Girls

Advertisements

9.28 Advertising structures should be of high quality, integrate with the street scene, and relate positively to the surrounding environmental context. In determining applications for express advertisement consent, the Council will consider their impact on public safety and amenity, including cumulative impact.

POLICY D4: Advertisements

Where advertisement consent is required, such consent will be permitted if the proposal respects the interests of public safety and amenity, by meeting the following criteria:

1. They do not adversely affect the visual amenity of the area, by reason of their design, siting, scale, illumination or noise, having regard to the character and use of the building and/or area;
2. They will not result in a proliferation of advertisements or added clutter within the public realm;
3. Any illumination respects the impact on visual amenity, potential light pollution, character of the area and buildings and functional need; and
4. The proposal does not have an adverse effect on highway safety or risk of antisocial behaviour.

Advertisement consent will not be permitted for poster advertising in the Green Belt. Other forms of advertisement in the Green Belt which require consent will be considered against the above criteria and whether they affect the openness or purposes of Green Belt land.

Reasoned Justification

9.29 Advertisements play an important role in promoting economic vitality, and where well designed, they can make a positive contribution to the street scene. At the same time a proliferation of signs can be unsightly, distracting and damaging to the appearance of the building, street or area.

9.30 Advertisements should be designed and located to avoid conflict with the historic character and appearance of heritage assets including conservation areas or damage to historic fabric. For example, internally illuminated box signs are generally not supported on heritage buildings or in conservation areas, as they often detract from historic character, but exceptions may be made where the design reflects the building's architectural details and enhances the area's special character.

9.31 Placement of digital advertisement units should engage with the Designing Out Crime Office.

Policy Links

- R2 - Development in Basildon Town Centre
- R3 - Primary Shopping Areas (PSA)
- D1 - Design and Place Shaping Principles
- GB1 - Protecting the Green Belt
- GB2 - New Development in the Green Belt
- HE1 - Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment

Evidence Links

- Essex Design Guide (2018)
- National Design Guide (2021)
- National Model Design Code (2021)

