Policy Title:

LPS12 - Creating Well-Designed Places

Existing Policies Which adopted Core Strategy or Policies Sites and Places (PSP) policy would eventually be replaced	**CS1 – High Quality Design** **PSP1 – Local Distinctiveness**
Non-Strategic / Strategic	**Strategic**

Purpose

South Gloucestershire encompasses large areas of distinctive and high quality built, natural, and rural landscapes, which should be safeguarded and enhanced, and where possible, referenced in development proposals.

National policy makes it clear that creating high quality buildings and places is fundamental to what the development process should achieve. The National Design Guide, alongside the National Model Design Code, forms a guide for how places that are well-designed, healthy, green, enduring and successful can be achieved in practice. National policy is also clear that planning permission should be refused for development that is not well designed, that fails to reflect local design policies and government guidance on design, and which fails to take opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions.

The aim of this design policy is therefore to shape and direct development proposals to ensure that proposals meet a high level of design quality and create exceptional and sustainable places.

More broadly, the design of places which people experience must be shaped with the understanding of the future needs of a changing world and be adaptable over time in response to climate change and evolving lifestyle and working patterns. These places need to be safe, help to improve community cohesion and make people feel proud of South Gloucestershire.

Public spaces, including parks, streets, and play & recreation areas, should foster a sense of belonging and safety and enable people to build relationships. Good design can also help to enable residents from all backgrounds to live and work in places that provide opportunities for easy movement between everyday places and the type of living environment which avoids separation or segregation.

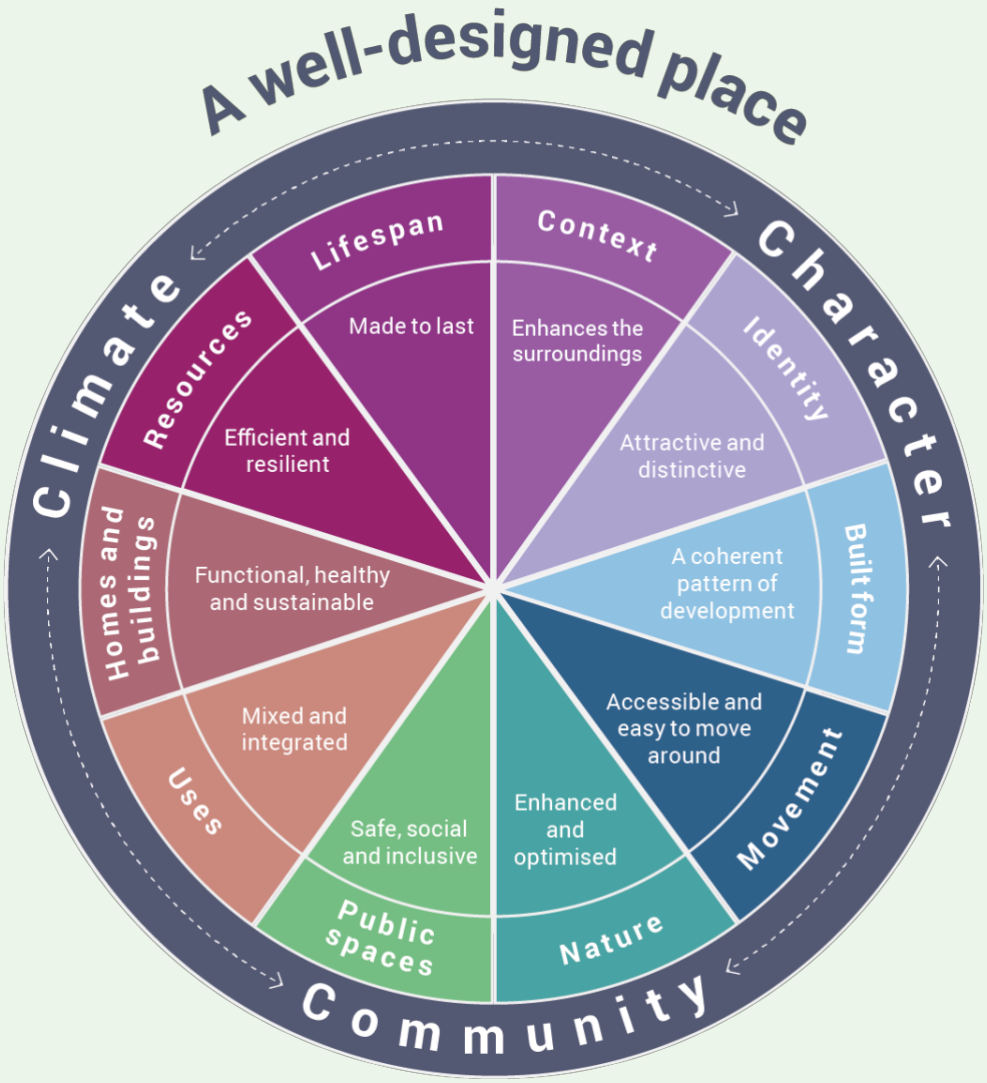


Figure 1. The 10 characteristics of well-designed places within the National Design Guide (NDG)

New developments can help to establish strong and inclusive communities, but this requires working with a range of stakeholders and using various approaches, including community engagement events, neighbourhood planning, design codes, and masterplans.

The supporting text below the policy wording signposts a range of other policies in the new Local Plan, which provide further detail and clarification to many of the points contained in this policy. This policy is also supported by a new optimising density approach for new developments in sustainable areas, which aims to make effective use of land.

The National Design Guide (NDG) sets out 10 key design characteristics, and these have been used to structure this design policy and supporting text, with headings generally grouped into related pairs for conciseness.

Policy wording

1. **Development proposals will be required to achieve the highest possible standards of design and site planning. Information submitted with an application should be proportionate to the scale, significance, and impact of the proposal; and**
2. **Proposals will be required to be consistent with the council's published design guides, design codes, Adopted masterplans and spatial frameworks, where they contain local design considerations; and**
3. **In order to raise design standards, it is expected that all types of Major development should engage the services of a design review panel which is endorsed by the Council and use the Council's pre-application service. An independent Building for a Healthy Life assessment will also be required for strategic sites in order to review and enhance the design quality of proposed schemes; and**
4. **Acceptable development proposals must demonstrate that the following design criteria have been met.**

Context and identity

5. **There is an understanding of, and constructive response to, the built, landscape and visual characteristics that make a particularly positive contribution to the distinctiveness and identity of the area, with significant weight being given to outstanding or innovative designs which respond to those positive features, to create a strong sense of place; and**
6. **The siting, form, scale, height, massing, detailing, colour and materials of the development respect and are informed by, the positive, locally distinctive qualities of both the site and its surrounding context; or**
7. **Where high-quality distinctive features do not exist either within or around the site, a new distinctive character has been created, based on the positive features found in the wider area.**

Built form

8. **The layout, form and appearance of the development must combine to create a well-designed, visually attractive and legible environment, which functions well for all users. Consideration should be given to the creation of focal points and landmarks, how buildings turn corners at junctions, and how built forms and landscaping terminate vistas; and**
9. **For backland and infill development, where a scheme is proposed either behind the main frontage of properties or in close proximity to other existing properties, careful consideration should be given to; avoiding amenity impacts, how the proposals respond to the character of the area, the provision of appropriate landscaping, and safe & appropriate access arrangements; and**

10. **The scale and massing of the development relates positively to the site and the local surrounding character, with minimal amenity impacts, while also making effective use of land; and**
11. **Construction materials are attractive, locally distinctive, complementary when viewed as a collection, and appropriate for their use and function, with a focus on robustness and a positive visual appearance over time; and**
12. **The arrangement and design of windows and doors (the fenestration) is visually attractive and functional. Larger windows for habitable rooms should be used, subject to limiting excessive solar gain; and**
13. **The orientation and siting of buildings contribute to the definition of the public realm and the visual quality of the street scene, with building facades and front doors facing the street, to promote natural surveillance and activity. Blank and inactive ground floor elevations which define areas of public realm, should be avoided.**

Movement

14. **Create or enable safe, convenient and sustainable connections to key destinations, places and adjoining communities, both within the site and beyond its boundaries, taking into account desire lines where appropriate; and**
15. **The layout integrates with existing or permitted adjacent development and connects with the wider network of active travel links, including Public Rights of Way, strategic green infrastructure corridors/routes, and any existing or proposed "Key Services and Facilities"; and**
16. **Any parking provided is conveniently sited, overlooked, well-landscaped and sensitively integrated into the public realm or built form, so that it does not dominate the street scene. It must meet the needs of all users, including visitors and people with disabilities.**

Nature and Public Spaces

17. **The natural environment is protected and enhanced, including features of landscape, nature conservation, heritage, or amenity value. Where public realm and open space is required or provided, it should be accessible for all users, and be attractive, functional, safe, varied, interesting, and encourage social interaction; and**
18. **An appropriate amount of high-quality and well-considered green and blue infrastructure has been provided, which contributes to high-quality public realm, streets, natural green spaces and climate adaptation, and which offers opportunities for play. Sustainable Drainage features (SUDs), such as swales and flood attenuation basins, must not compromise other green infrastructure features, such as public open spaces; and**
19. **For all types of Major development, an integrated public art scheme must be developed and delivered that is site specific to the locality and best serves the needs of existing and new communities; and**

20. **Boundary treatments and interfaces between public and private areas are robust and built to be long-lasting, define the public realm, clearly establish the difference between public and private spaces, and avoid small areas of incidental open spaces; and**
21. **The most appropriate and robust materials, street furniture (including lighting) and finishes have been utilised, to create a sense of place which has variety and interest, while not adding clutter within the street scene. Any good-quality existing surface materials, boundary treatments and street furniture must, wherever possible, be retained in situ, or within the wider development.**

Uses, Homes and Buildings

22. **Developments at any scale must function well and create positive and adaptable living environments. Residential development must maximise the provision of dual-aspect homes and minimise the provision of single aspect homes; and**
23. **Buildings and public realm have been provided which have the potential to be adaptable over time, to accommodate a range of uses and potential occupiers, being socially inclusive, age-friendly, accessible and tenure blind; and**
24. **Safe, secure and healthy living, working, recreation and travelling environments have been provided, where opportunities for criminal activities are designed out. Secure and appropriately sized private amenity areas should be created, and the design of the public realm must promote activity and social engagement; and**
25. **An appropriate level of space and facilities are provided and designed into the development for the sorting and storage of recyclable and other waste materials, the composting of household waste, and the collection of all waste materials.**

Resources and Lifespan

26. **The conservation of natural resources, including land, water, energy and materials in buildings and development has been considered, forming part of the strategy to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change, helping to provide well-designed places over the longer-term; and**
27. **A layout, form and mix of uses is established which contributes to the creation of compact and walkable neighbourhoods; and**
28. **Locally sourced and sustainable materials are used where possible to minimise energy use and embodied carbon emissions; and**
29. **All buildings are designed to minimise energy demand and to be resilient to projected changes in the local climate over the lifetime of the development, achieved through the orientation, built-form, layout, aspect, glazing design and siting of development. Careful consideration of microclimate should be made to avoid any negative impacts on amenity, such as from excessive wind or temperatures. It is important to optimise passive solar gain to reduce winter space heating demand, while avoiding summer over-heating; and**
30. **On-site, renewable electricity generation installations have been maximised and steps taken to mitigate their visual impact.**

Supporting text

1. The National Planning Policy Framework makes clear that creating high quality buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Creating well-designed places requires an understanding of a wide range of principles, across numerous disciplines. Therefore, this policy draws on and supports a wide range of emerging plan priorities, other emerging policies in the Local Plan 2020, area-based objectives, as well as the supporting planning documents.

Context and Identity

2. There are a wide range of built and landscape characters which exist within South Gloucestershire, ranging from mature urban locations, such as, Staple Hill, Kingswood, Hanham, post-war suburban areas such as Filton and Bradley Stoke, newer communities at Charlton Hayes and Stoke Gifford, Market Towns with different characters, and a wide range of villages set within different rural contexts.

3. A character and context appraisal should be provided within the Design and Access Statement to support a planning application, and to show how the local context has been considered and taken into account in the design of the development.

4. It remains common for developers, in undertaking a context appraisal, to attempt to justify further indistinct development, for example, by referring to 20th century post-war development of indistinct quality nearby or claiming that the locality lacks distinction by way of the variety of ages and styles of development that exist in the area. In justifying new development in accordance with the national planning policy requirements, this approach will not be acceptable. It may be necessary for context and character appraisals to look further afield than the immediate locality or most numerous buildings in an area to identify and respond to distinctive and positive building types and other features of quality, such as boundary treatments, landscape features, and locally distinctive materials, to inform new development. This process should allow flexibility to support innovative design approaches.

5. Conservation Area Appraisals, Village Design Statements and The South Gloucestershire Landscape Character Assessment may, where applicable in the vicinity of a development, also provide good sources of information that assist in discerning such distinctive local character.

Built form

6. The design and placement of built forms creates people's homes and living environments, defines spaces such as streets and parks, contributes to character and identity, and has a significant impact on people's daily lives.

7. Legibility, or the understanding of a place, can be created by sequences of natural or built landmark features, and by ensuring that views through a site terminate at landmarks, such as a mature tree or interesting new façade. Longer views towards potentially negative features, such as blank walls or garage doors, should be avoided.

8. Making effective use of land, particularly in locations which are served by public transport, and which are close to town centres, employment areas, shops, schools, and other facilities, is a key aspect of sustainable development. The new Making Effective Use of Land Policy (Policy LP1) sets out the locations where higher-density development should be provided, supported by the Density and Character Study. Ways to optimise how sustainable sites are developed will have an impact on built forms, including taller buildings and a greater proportion of apartments, but this should be considered alongside how development proposals positively respond to the context and established character of the surrounding area.

9. This can be achieved partly through the use of high-quality and locally distinctive materials, which must be selected based on their robustness and ability to be easily maintained over time. The use of textured through-coloured, cement-based render systems is often problematic due to extensive and significant issues relating to biological staining, which creates negative visual impacts and can require on-going and costly maintenance. Very careful attention to detailing is required when using these systems, including ensuring water runoff away from building facades from roofs and windowsills, to avoid damage and staining. Protection from overhanging eaves is another useful method to be aware of.

10. Natural pennant stone is one of the most important and locally distinctive building materials within South Gloucestershire and has been used for centuries in the construction of boundary walls along roads and fields, and within property walls. The use of this high-quality material, or modern references to it, should form a key part of development proposals when considering the selection of materials and the character of new development.

11. Proposals for backland and infill forms of development can pose issues relating to their general impact on existing properties, often involving the loss of existing garden areas, and built forms affecting amenity. These issues need very careful consideration and will require sensitive design awareness and approaches.

12. When considering fenestration (the design and arrangement of windows and doors), it is important to provide windows which allow a good level of natural light to enter a property, while also providing a good outlook. Excessive solar gain should be avoided, and external or integrated solar shading devices may be required. For habitable spaces, such as living rooms, dining rooms, and kitchens, small windows should be avoided, as should larger areas of blank wall within main elevations which define areas of public realm.

13. The existing and future development potential of adjoining sites, or the potential for the area to achieve a coherent, interconnected, and integrated built form, must not be prejudiced by proposals. Where such potential may reasonably exist, including on sites with different use or ownership, development will be expected to either progress with a comprehensive scheme or, by means of its layout and form, enable a co-ordinated approach to be adopted towards adjoining sites future development.

Movement

14. Safe, convenient, sustainable and direct movement between areas of the district is an integral part of well-designed places and access to homes, jobs and services should be promoted and enhanced through the design process. To enable this, developments must provide appropriate connections, both within, and into surrounding areas. It is also critical to consider the quality of the connections, which should be usable by a wide range of potential users, including those with disabilities. Pedestrians should be prioritised as part of the design process and considered at the top of the movement hierarchy. Consideration should be given to the specific materials used, lighting, the need to establish clear lines of sight, and desire lines.

15. Key Services and Facilities and appropriate walking & cycling distances to them, are referred to in the new Sustainable Movement and Transport Infrastructure Policy (LPS9) and set out in the saved Policy PSP11. The term 'Active travel' includes modes of travel which involve a level of activity, including walking, wheeling and cycling. Wheeling encompasses a range of modes such as trips made by wheelchair, mobility scooters, adapted cycles, e-cycles, scooters, and cycle sharing schemes. The Government has published the Active Travel Local Authority Toolkit which should be referred to.

16. The use of rear parking courts within housing developments often results in an inefficient use of land and can result in valuable private amenity space being lost. Active surveillance and overlooking into rear parking courts can be restricted by property boundaries meaning residents do not have a direct view of their vehicles, and rear gardens become exposed to potential security issues. Parking spaces are also placed further away from the front doors of properties which impacts on accessibility. This form of parking solution will therefore generally not be supported but may be acceptable where significant and direct overlooking from habitable rooms of properties is provided and where other more secure solutions, such as frontage parking, are not possible due to site constraints. Parking for residential areas must be well landscaped, defined by secure solid construction boundaries, with high quality paving.

17. There are various alternative ways to provide parking, particularly within higher-density developments, including the following. Integrated, wider garages, allow for comfortable use and can also provide space for the storage of household items. Undercroft parking involves the provision of spaces below a building and within the building's footprint, often with open fronts. Basement parking is provided below ground floor level, under a building, often used within apartment developments as a way of making effective use of land and not reducing the developable area of a site. Podium style parking often involves an area of surface-level parking with a first-floor podium structure above, which can be used for shared communal amenity space, meaning the same area of land can be used for multiple functions.

18. Avoiding long rows of parking spaces is essential within residential developments. Where this approach is required, spaces must be broken up with high quality and visually significant landscaping, such as a combination of shrubs and trees. In all forms of non-residential developments, ensuring generous tree-cover within parking areas is critical, and helps to break up areas of parking, provides shade, enhances visual quality and contributes towards biodiversity.

Nature and public spaces

19. Along with built forms, landscape features, open spaces and the public realm have the most significant impact on people's daily lives, with most of the land within a development often being taken up by these features. The contribution of natural design features should be considered a critical part of any scheme design.

20. It is essential that all developments provide a high-quality public realm, which includes the streets, open spaces, and any parking areas. This can be achieved by retaining any high-quality and positive existing landscape features and focussing on providing additional features, such as good quality landscaping and street trees throughout the public realm. The landscape design of any development must be carefully considered throughout the design process, in combination with any built form proposals, and not left to the end of the process.

21. Blue and green infrastructure, which is proposed as part of a development should be complementary, resulting in usable areas of Public Open Space (POS) which are not compromised by other types of infrastructure, such as swales or drainage basins. Formal POS should not include larger flood attenuation basins, but smaller swale features may be acceptable if usable areas of POS are retained. Opportunities for play for a wide range of people should be provided within appropriately sized open spaces, and it may be positive to provide informal or natural play areas alongside the more standard formal equipped play areas.

22. It may be necessary to design in and provide below-ground provision for trees within the public realm, such as root protection and growth systems, to ensure the proper growth and longevity of the trees. This is particularly important for street trees which may be limited by surrounding built features, or in situations where it is important to ensure the longevity of a feature or landmark tree which forms part of a design concept.

23. Public art schemes should be delivered in accordance with our Art and Design in the Public Realm – Advice Note with a % for art being allocated to deliver appropriate outcomes for the site. The provision of public art will be a key indicator of good design and should be seen as an opportunity to involve the local community.

24. Boundary treatments must be provided to distinguish between private and public areas. For residential development, a front garden boundary, or boundary to a shared communal area of amenity space, must be provided in the form of either a planted or solid feature, or a combination of both. The type of boundary treatment will depend on the context of the site and the character of the proposed development, but common approaches include the use of hedges and shrubs, metal estate railings and low brick or natural stone walls. For rear garden boundaries, it is acceptable to use timber fencing of various types, but where a rear garden boundary meets an area of public realm, a solid construction wall should be used, to improve robustness, longevity and security. Where a parking court for an apartment block is defined by rear garden boundaries of houses, these must be 1.8m tall solid walls and the parking area must be well-landscaped and include higher quality paving materials to enhance the visual quality and amenity value of residents living environment.

25. Any lighting of the public realm or individual buildings should be appropriate to the intended use and functioning of the development, contribute to actual and perceived

safety and avoid negative impacts on residents, as well as existing wildlife and ecology.

Use, homes and buildings

26. Developments should be adaptable over time, in order to be able to accommodate changing working, employment and shopping patterns, including people working from home, or potentially choosing to stay in their homes for longer into older age. Age-friendly design principles should be considered throughout the design process. The 2019 Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) study titled 'A Home for the Ages', identified that the proportion of over 60's will make up over 25% of the English population by 2024, and that age-friendly design considerations must form an integral part of the planning and design process. Recommendations include an increase in the levels of appropriate age-friendly accommodation, improving accessibility standards in new homes, supporting people to move into different and more age-friendly homes, and the better integration of public services and awareness.

27. These shifting patterns make it more important to create well-designed living environments, with good storage spaces, natural light and views, with access to a range of quality private and public open spaces and public realm. The Internal Space Standards and Accessibility policy sets out requirements in relation to accessible and adaptable development, including residential development.

28. In addition, social inclusion design principles are important to consider during the design process, which includes how a wide range of cultures and social groups, with varying access requirements and abilities, can be accommodated in a more equal way.

29. Dual-aspect homes with opening windows on at least two sides are more likely to result in liveable accommodation due to better daylight, a greater chance of direct sunlight for longer periods, natural cross-ventilation, a greater potential to address overheating, a choice of outlook, access to a quieter sides of a building, greater flexibility in the use of rooms, and more potential for future adaptability. Conversely, single aspect homes are more likely to present liveability challenges such as being more difficult to ventilate naturally and more likely to overheat.

30. The design of new development will need to consider ducting and provision for digital infrastructure and electric vehicle (EV) charging to ensure it is well integrated into the site design to allow maintenance and servicing and avoid negative impacts on the quality of places and spaces.

31. Housing developments must be tenure blind/inclusive, with the same attention to detail and use of high-quality materials and boundary treatments used in affordable housing provision as market housing. Parking to fronts should be enhanced by the use of finer paving materials and attention the provision of landscaping between and around groups of spaces.

32. Safety and security is a key design factor in any type of development. For residential, securing private amenity spaces, such as gardens, can be achieved by back-to-back, or back-to-side approaches, where backs of properties and their gardens back onto each other, to create a perimeter block. This also leads to properties facing outwards onto surrounding streets, which creates activity at the front of the buildings and increased overlooking and surveillance of the public realm. It is essential to ensure that building fronts define and overlook areas of parking, open space and walking & cycling routes, to increase safety. Policy LP30 - Private and Communal Amenity Space Standards, sets out the requirements for private and communal amenity spaces.

33. Waste storage and collection must be carefully considered in any form of development, but waste provision in residential developments in particular, must be well-integrated, visually appealing, and functional. The Council's Waste & Recycling Collection SPD sets out the requirements. In terraced houses, space for the storage of a range of waste and recycling bins or containers, can be successfully integrated into the fronts of properties, in screened storage structures, which can also be integrated within porch canopies, also providing bike storage and electrical car-charging cables. This type of approach also creates clear and robust boundaries between properties and can be successfully integrated with soft landscaping.

Resources and lifespan

34. Well-designed places should seek to maximise the contributions of natural resources such as the sun, ground heat and wind, and include passive measures for light, temperature, ventilation and heat. They should aim to make use of renewable energy infrastructures, such as photovoltaic arrays, ground source heat pumps and district heating systems, to reduce demand for non-sustainable energy sources.

35. Policies on Climate Change Adaptation, Mitigation and Resilience, Embodied Carbon, and Energy Management in New Development, set out comprehensive requirements.

36. Locally sourced materials should be selected where possible, subject to being high-quality and locally distinctive. For example, the use of natural pennant stone can be sourced close to development sites within South Gloucestershire, requires limited travel miles, generates local jobs, responds to the strong character of the area, and is a robust and interesting material which requires almost no on-going maintenance.

37. It may be appropriate in certain situations to retain and renovate existing buildings, where this forms part of a more sustainable approach to development, or where existing structures have local historic and cultural significance. This approach can have significant visual, community and conservation benefits.

38. Good urban design approaches can also lead to a reduction in energy demand, through the provision of fewer detached homes, and more joined properties such a terraces and apartments, which save energy and materials through shared party walls.

39. An emphasis on the orientation of buildings and their roof forms should form an integral part of the design process, taking into account opportunities for maximising solar exposure for PV panels, and providing good levels of sunlight to allow for passive heating and good internal light levels.

40. In terms of mitigating or limiting the impacts from solar gain in developments, relatively straightforward design solutions exist, such as incorporating bris soleil, projecting canopies or the planting of trees. Balconies can also be used as solar shading devices which also provide valuable private amenity space and a way to add architectural interest to the design of an apartment block.

41. During the design process, micro-climates must be considered, mainly focussing on reducing excessive wind and solar gain which could be created through the orientation and placement of buildings. It is important to consider the prevailing wind direction and avoid a layout which focusses wind, and which creates wind tunnel effects, particularly at ground floor level and affecting private amenity spaces at higher levels.

42. The visual impact of roof-top solar panels can be reduced by not placing solar panels on the roofs of buildings which form key terminal vistas, or only placing panels on darker roof tiles, as this makes the panels blend in more. Gable-fronted roof forms, where roof pitches and ridge lines run perpendicular to the front elevation, can help to hide solar panels when viewing buildings from the street.

Additions	
Key evidence	The Density and Character Study (2022) Active Travel Local Authority Toolkit Art and Design in the Public Realm – Advice Note A Home for the Ages – RIBA (2019) Waste & Recycling Collection – Guidance for New Developments SPD
Other relevant policies to cross-reference?	LP1 - Effective Use of Land in Urban and Town Hubs Policy LP22 - Parking Standards Policy PSP2 - Landscape Policy LPS9 - Sustainable Movement & Transport Infrastructure Policy LP18 - Internal Space Standards and Accessibility policy LP30 - Private and Communal Amenity Space Standards Policy