

# COVENTRY URBAN DESIGN GUIDANCE



Coventry City Council



# FOREWORD

During recent years Coventry has seen many varied developments take place across the city. The majority of these developments have had, and are having, a positive impact on the quality of the built environment and the image of Coventry. We want to continue building on these successes by encouraging more distinctive and well-designed schemes. We must acknowledge that we are building for present and future generations of Coventry, our task is to ensure that we provide high quality buildings and public spaces now, and that they remain as a lasting legacy for everyone to enjoy in years to come.



Many of these developments have incorporated urban design principles from their earliest stages. It is our belief that these principles should be a prerequisite consideration of all new development. This document is intended to explain some of the key issues involved, though it does not claim to be an exhaustive guide to the subject or provide solutions for designers. Its purpose is to make all those involved in development aware of the importance of good urban design and the issues we wish to see addressed.

The achievement of good urban design will ultimately depend upon the skill of designers involved with new development as well as the vision and commitment of those who employ them. The city council through this document accepts its responsibility for a commitment to good urban design and its role in the development process.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dave Arrowsmith". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Councillor David Arrowsmith**  
Cabinet Member (Urban Regeneration and Regional Planning)

September 2004

# CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION PAGE 06

A BRIEF HISTORY OF COVENTRY PAGE 08

THE EIGHT PRINCIPLES OF URBAN DESIGN

PAGE 10



## CHARACTER

Enhancing townscape and landscape character by reflecting locally distinct patterns of development

PAGE 14



## CONTINUITY

Strengthening the continuity of street frontages and the enclosure of space by development that clearly defines the boundaries between public and private space

PAGE 18



## QUALITY

Providing high quality public spaces which are safe, uncluttered, active and easily identifiable

PAGE 22



## CONNECTIONS

Making places that inter-connect and are easy to move through

PAGE 26



## LEGIBILITY

Ensuring that developments are readily understood by users

PAGE 30



## ADAPTABILITY

Encouraging developments which can adapt to changing social, technological, economic and market conditions

PAGE 34



## DIVERSITY

Promoting diversity through mixes of use which work together to create vital and viable places

PAGE 38



## SUSTAINABILITY

Ensuring that developments are sustainable in terms of their design, layout and density

COMBINING THE URBAN DESIGN PRINCIPLES PAGE 42

URBAN DESIGN IN THE PLANNING PROCESS PAGE 44

APPENDIX: THE CONSULTATION PROCESS PAGE 46

FURTHER ADVICE PAGE 48

# INTRODUCTION

## The Guidance

This document has the status of Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) and is an accompaniment to the Coventry Development Plan (CDP). It is not new policy, but is intended as a more detailed explanation of Policy BE2 from the CDP – The Principles of Urban Design, which are set out below:

- 1 Enhancing townscape and landscape character by reflecting locally distinct patterns of development**
- 2 Strengthening the continuity of street frontages and the enclosure of space by development that clearly defines the boundaries between public and private space**
- 3 Providing high quality public spaces which are safe uncluttered, active and easily identifiable**
- 4 Making places that inter-connect and are easy to move through**
- 5 Ensuring that developments are readily understood by users**
- 6 Encouraging developments which can adapt to changing social, technological, economic and market conditions**
- 7 Promoting diversity through mixes of use which work together to create vital and viable places**
- 8 Ensuring that developments are sustainable in terms of their design, layout and density**

High quality urban design will be promoted in Coventry by ensuring that all new development takes these principles into account.

This document is split into three sections: an introduction and brief history of Coventry that puts the guidance in context; the main part of the document explaining each of the eight principles of urban design; and a final section that explains how developments can combine the principles of urban design and how urban design fits into the planning process. The Appendix explains the consultation process that took place prior to the formal adoption of this guidance.

In the main part of the document the principles of urban design set out above are explained in more detail and illustrated with examples of development in Coventry that meet the aims of the principles.

The aim of this document is to:

- **Raise awareness and understanding of urban design**
- **Provide advice to applicants for planning permission**
- **Encourage an innovative, design led, approach to development**

There are several mechanisms for advancing these aims and the urban design policies in BE2. They are:

- **Urban design frameworks** – area based
- **Development briefs** – site based
- **Design statements** – major developments

These (and other design guidance documents) are discussed in more detail in the CDP and in the section titled Urban Design in the Planning Process.

## What is Urban Design?

Urban design is the art of making places for people. It includes the way places work and matters such as community safety, as well as how they look. It concerns the connections between people and places, movement and urban form, nature and the built fabric, and the processes for ensuring successful villages, towns and cities. (By Design, May 2000). Urban design determines the very shape of the streets and public spaces which make up our urban areas. Good design should provide stimulus to the senses through choice of materials, architectural form and landscaping. (Towards an Urban Renaissance, 1999).

Urban design has a prominent role to play in the ongoing debate about the future of towns and cities. It is an important factor in any physical, social or economic regeneration project. In 1997 the government set out three themes underlying its approach to planning in Planning Policy Guidance note 1 (PPG1). These were sustainable development, mixed use and design. PPG1 emphasised that 'Good design should be the aim of all those involved in the development process and should be encouraged everywhere.' The government is now consulting on a revision to its planning policy; PPG1 is to be replaced by PPS1 (Planning Policy Statement 1).

The consultation paper on Planning Policy Statement 1 – Creating Sustainable Communities – proposes sustainable development as the core principle of the planning system. It states that 'High quality design ensures usable, durable and adaptable places and is a key element in achieving sustainable development.' It goes on to say 'Planning should encourage good design... local planning authorities should plan positively for the achievement of good quality urban design by adopting clear policies and guidance that establish the key principles and criteria for future development.' The consultation period on the draft version of PPS1 ended in May 2004 and it is intended that PPS1 will become planning policy towards the end of 2004.

## The Coventry Development Plan

The Coventry Development Plan seeks to achieve development which lifts the human spirit and which meets the whole community's needs and aspirations. In the CDP the overall strategic policy, OS 5, Achieving a High Quality City, promotes and encourages measures to achieve a higher quality of life and living environment. The Built Environment chapter policy aim is 'to achieve a high quality built environment throughout Coventry, not only for its own sake, but to maintain the attraction of the City as a good place in which to live, work, play, invest and visit.' The Chapter concentrates on the buildings and the spaces and the environment around them. The strategic policy covering this is Policy BE1, Overall Built Environment Strategy. It includes policies for creating a higher quality environment by:

- **Ensuring that new developments are of a high standard and relate well to what is already there**
- **Giving design advice on transport corridors, gateways, the historic environment and specific topics**
- **Protecting and enhancing the environment generally**

This aim is supported by a framework of policies and guidance. Policy BE2, The Principles of Urban Design is a key policy which those undertaking development will be required to consider early in the planning and design process.

Depending on the location of any proposals, they will need to take into account policies for corridors, gateways, Conservation Areas, historic buildings and archaeology – referred to in policies BE4 to 15. Policies for specific areas are dealt with in other parts of the CDP. The Ancient Arden Design Guidelines are referred to in the Green Environment chapter, while the city centre is a separate chapter in its own right. Various other policies such as those relating to access and movement should also be considered. There will also be design advice for specific topics that will usually be in the form of SPG or SPD (supplementary planning document).

# A BRIEF HISTORY OF COVENTRY

The compact modern city of Coventry occupies about 40 square miles of Warwickshire land that slopes gently down from the Forest of Arden at the north west to the Avon river valley. The city centre itself covers the original settlement site on a low hill overlooking the River Sherbourne.

The Saxon origins of Coventry (Cofa's tree) are obscure, but the consecration of the great Benedictine monastery of St Mary, on the site of the earlier St Osburg's, by Leofric and Godiva in 1043 led to the rapid growth of a city that became the economic hub of the midlands within a century and England's fourth largest city. The city's prosperity, based on the cloth industry, reached its height in the 14th and 15th centuries, from when the great medieval churches and guildhall date. Three surviving medieval sandstone spires still dominate the city centre skyline but there may have been seven before the suppression of the great monastery churches in the 1530s and 40s.

Decline set in soon after this and the city's fortunes only started to revive in the mid 18th century with first silk ribbon weaving, and then watchmaking becoming major industries. The great boom however began at the end of the 19th century with the city becoming the country's centre of cycle and then motor car production. This led to a quadrupling of Coventry's population by 1940, and it's becoming Britain's fastest growing city. Neatly planned suburbs spread in all directions. Plans had already been produced under Donald Gibson for radical reconstruction of the still medieval city centre when on 14 November 1940 it was devastated by bombing.

The city's growth however continued unabated with massive wartime industrial expansion. The most radical reconstruction of any British city was begun as soon as possible after the war, with large sections of Europe's first pedestrian shopping area complete by 1955 in a 'Festival of Britain' style of warm brick and stone.

In 1955 Arthur Ling took over the planning of the city, that was still rapidly growing, and he was instrumental in introducing a more overtly modern look, with more bare concrete but also bold colour and a larger city scale with focal white tower blocks to counterpoint the red sandstone spires. The highly advanced ring road around the city centre was begun. The opening of Basil Spence's new Coventry Cathedral on 25 May 1962, to great popular acclaim was perhaps the symbolic culmination of the post-war modernisation of the city.

Since the late 1970s with the decline of some traditional manufacturing industries, Coventry had once again to reinvent itself as a thriving commercial and office centre with two major universities. This transformation is gaining momentum, and the principles of urban design set out in this document are intended to guide future development and to help ensure that Coventry is a city that everyone can feel proud of.



**The Pedestrian Precinct**  
Immediately after the 1940 blitz Donald Gibson began to implement a plan for the city centre in which pedestrians and motor vehicles were to be separated. The Upper Precinct, a two level pedestrianised shopping street west of Broadgate, aligned on the old Cathedral spire, was the first part to be constructed. Market Way, Smithford Way and the covered market completed the original Gibson plan, based on a cruciform arrangement. Following on from this came the Lower Precinct, designed and built under the direction of Arthur Ling.

Images below and to the right are reproduced courtesy of Local Studies, Coventry Central Library, Coventry City Archives and Coventry City Council



Medieval street scenes survived into the 1900's



Coventry adapted to new transport requirements



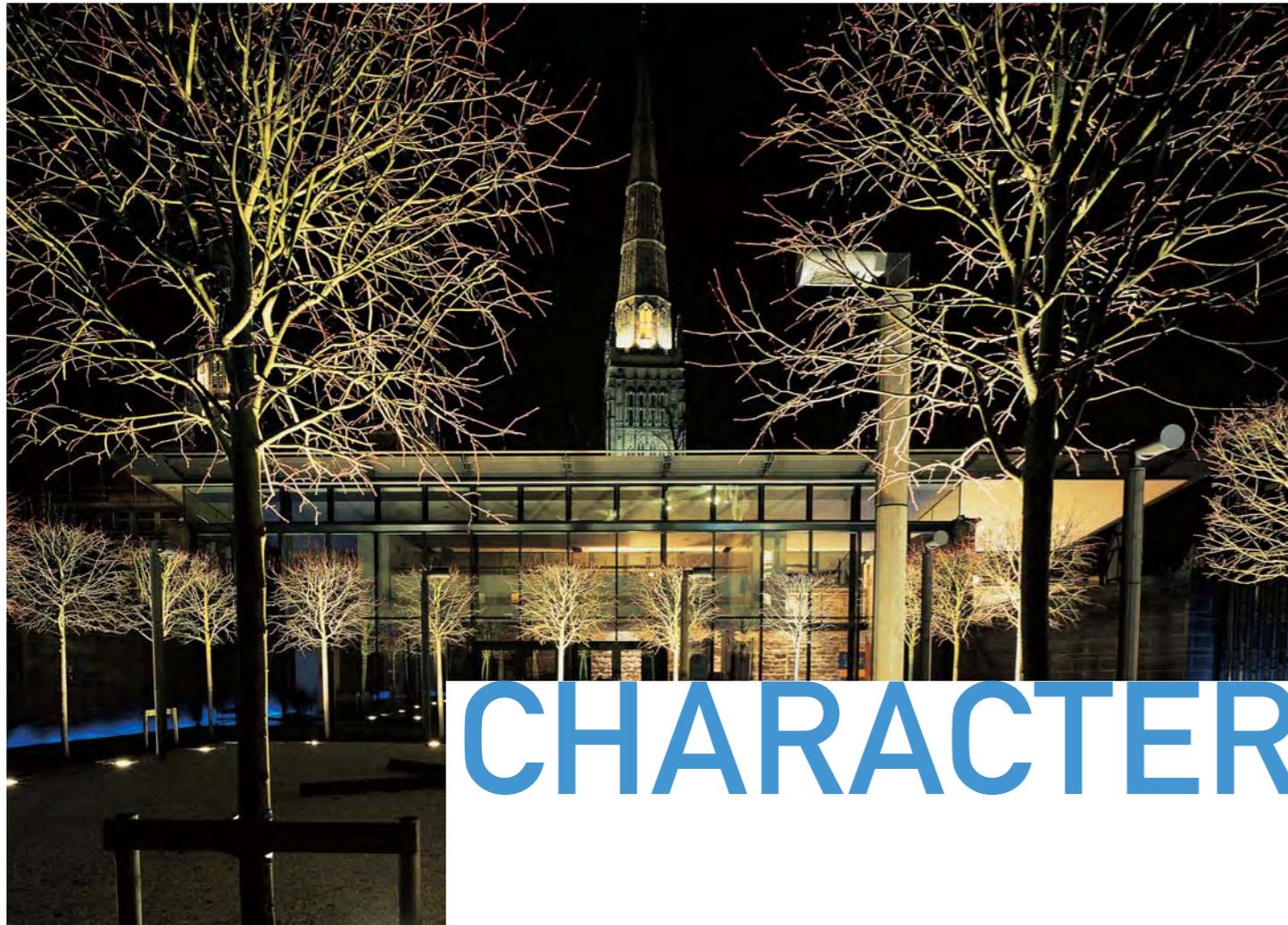
The city centre was badly damaged during the war



Reconstruction followed the blitz

The Cathedral did not escape the destruction





# CHARACTER

## 1 Enhancing townscape and landscape character by reflecting locally distinct patterns of development

It is important to consider the unique characteristics of any location within Coventry where new development is proposed. This should prompt designers to think about how the form, style and size of new development relates to, and integrates with, its surroundings in a complementary manner.

In design terms, the overall aim of any new development should be to create distinctiveness and quality. This can be achieved by drawing inspiration from existing form and styles, but also by utilising innovative materials, thoughtful details and modern form where appropriate.

Consideration should be given to:

### Setting

The topography and natural features of a development site should help shape any proposed development and be retained by it where possible. The existing ecology and biodiversity on the site should be given consideration where new planting or landscaping is proposed. Coventry has many green spaces and corridors including street trees, parks, commons, ancient woodlands, hedgerows and natural open watercourses. New development should respect these.

Views towards a proposed development from both near and far locations should be considered. The development should seek to integrate with its surroundings and avoid any adverse impact on these views, particularly on the adjacent skyline.

Proposed development should respect the existing urban structure and grain of Coventry, which comprises of the network of streets, open spaces and buildings found within the city. In addition to older areas of a distinctive and varied character, Coventry is also notable for its well planned, cohesive 20th century suburbs. Historic environments and patterns of development should be respected and where they have been lost it may be appropriate to reinstate them.

### Built Form

It is important to ensure that the scale, massing and height of new development respects adjacent existing buildings. There may be a case for contrast, which can be appealing, but this will be dependent on location. The government's drive for higher density residential development will require designers to come up with appropriate solutions in situations where a contrast in scale might be required. More guidance on 'tall' buildings is set out in Principle 5. All future development should add to the increasing amount of high quality architecture in Coventry.

### Materials

The use of a carefully considered palette of materials can help to give development a distinct character. These might be materials that have a particular historical association with the area the development is in, or they may be modern and suited technically to the development. In Coventry typical materials used have been a red brown brick, warm red sandstone, plain clay tiles and Welsh slate. However, many other materials have been used successfully and this list is not prescriptive.

Where no precedent has been set the challenge is to use materials, whether they are traditional or modern, to create a high quality area with a distinct character. It is the degree to which any material is appropriate to its surroundings and its function that should determine its use. Methods of construction and repair have an impact on character and should also be used appropriately.



### Priory Visitor Centre

This building and the associated courtyard garden provide a transition between old and new areas of Coventry. The Visitor Centre itself is an elegant modern structure topped off by an expressive 'floating' roof with high quality materials adding to its distinctiveness. The intimate courtyard space is finished off with a high level of detail and provides a calm setting for the visitor centre.

Creating distinctive character  
**Priory Place**



New development using a traditional built form  
**Ivy Farm Lane**



Development appropriate to its surroundings  
**Castle Yard**



Retaining and utilising existing landscape features  
**Draper's Field**

# Striking architectural form set against a traditional backdrop

**Browns Café Bar**

**Browns Café Bar**  
 Situated on the edge of the cathedral quarter, Browns is a good example of an innovative architectural form constructed using traditional local materials. The building has a number of fine details including the raised lettering on the entrance and the sky sign. Lighting is also used to good effect at night.



# CONTINUITY

## 2

**Strengthening the continuity of street frontages and the enclosure of space by development that clearly defines the boundaries between public and private spaces**

The way that buildings are aligned along streets can help to define and reinforce the line of the street itself. Well-defined streets are important in creating attractive urban areas that are easy to move around. A continuity of built form along streets is preferable to a discordant collection of buildings and spaces that show little regard for one another. There is some scope for variation to add interest or signify importance, but only where deemed appropriate and in keeping with the character of the area. Buildings should not turn their backs to the street or public space.

It is important to define or imply the ownership of buildings and spaces within the built environment. Doing this can help to reduce acts of vandalism and can also provide a sense of security and safety. A clear definition of what is public and what is private space should be one of the aims of any new development.

Consideration should be given to:

### **Building Line**

New development should follow or establish a common building line along streets to create a continuity of built form. Setbacks from this line can be used for emphasis or to create public space, but usually only where a building is considered to have an important role or civic function.

The height of adjoining existing buildings should generally be followed by new development, although some variation on this can be desirable and help create interest and an urban scale where appropriate. The re-development of 'gap sites' in street frontages is encouraged providing development adheres to the advice given in this guide.

### **Public and Private Space**

Building along the line of the street or as a perimeter block enables private and secure space to be created to the rear of buildings. This space can be used as private gardens, communal space or secure parking areas.

To the front of buildings a sense of ownership should be created by using architectural details or landscape treatments. These might include gaps or changes in level between the street and the building, railings or walls, surface treatments and transitional devices such as gates or archways. Development that creates opportunities for natural surveillance to the front and the rear through balconies and glazing is encouraged.

### **Definition of Streets and Spaces**

Enclosure and definition can be created by a variety of built forms. Where no precedent exists (i.e. built form), designers should consider what type of space they are enclosing – street, square, main road etc – and vary building height appropriately to the width of the space. A height to width ratio of 1:1-1:3 is generally acceptable for streets. For major roads and boulevards a height to width ratio of 1:2-1:5 would be more appropriate.

Where possible, squares should be enclosed by built form on all sides, with a strong vertical emphasis. Spaces such as waterways and 'greens' benefit from being overlooked and defined by buildings that front onto them – rather than turning their backs to them.

Where required, additional development can be achieved by using setbacks on upper floors that are less visible from within the space at ground level. This can help reduce the dominance of built form along streets, in squares and other spaces defined by buildings.

### **Access**

Placing the main access to a building, or a part of it, directly off the street rather than to its rear identifies and reinforces the transition between public and private space. Streets that have multiple entrances to buildings are more active and lively (which is desirable) than those with one communal entrance and large blank façades. With apartment blocks consideration should be given to providing individual entrances to ground floor units in addition to a communal entrance for those on upper floors.

Residential Street with common building line  
**Daimler Green**



Physical definition of public and private space  
**Allesley**



Built form defines a residential square  
**Parkside**



### CV Central

This contemporary residential development reinforces the line of the old street pattern and respects the existing height of buildings around it. The building provides a distinction between what is public and what is private space and uses a gateway to reinforce this transition. Behind the building there are secure areas for parking, and the balconies to the front of the development provide opportunities for natural surveillance onto the street.

## Balcony provides natural surveillance and visible activity

### The Varsity

### The Varsity

The conversion of the existing buildings has been achieved without the loss of any external quality. The infill element works well and provides visible activity and opportunities for natural surveillance from the balcony. This element of the building respects the building line and provides continuity along the Little Park Street elevation.



# QUALITY

## 3 Providing high quality public spaces which are safe, uncluttered, active and easily identifiable



Public space includes streets, squares, waterways, recreational areas and parks; it is an integral part of the urban fabric and should make a positive contribution to the built environment. The design of these spaces influences their character and helps to express their intended use, whether this is formal, recreational or practical. Public space should be accessible to all members of the community.

Quality public space is achieved through details, materials and activities; investment in these key elements can turn public spaces into memorable and enjoyable places. The layout of public space, the way it is enclosed, the activity that takes place around its edges and within it, the choice of surface treatments and the maintenance of the space all contribute to its image and quality.

Consideration should be given to:

### Activity

All public space should have a function. This can take place within it and around its edges. Activity taking place around the edge of a space provides natural surveillance through overlooking, and interest in the form of the various uses that might take place. Public spaces that are active for a significant part of the day are desirable.

A variety of ground floor activities are encouraged in new development to help enliven public space. These may benefit from being visible from within the space through the use of glazing or open fronts. Development with inactive ground floors will be discouraged where appropriate to the type and location of development. Upper floors with balconies, particularly on residential buildings, provide overlooked space as well as creating interest on building facades.

### Details and Objects

Items such as street furniture, signage, lighting and artwork have a great deal of impact on the quality of public realm. They should be well designed and durable, not create unnecessary clutter and be carefully positioned so as not to obstruct the movement of pedestrians, particularly blind people, wheelchair users or vehicles. The Coventry Streetscape, Signing and Information Strategy provides information on suitable products that have been used successfully in Coventry which developers may wish to use again.

Standard and bespoke products can be used in combination to furnish public spaces and give them a distinct identity. They should all be in keeping with their location. The siting of street furniture or other objects should be done to encourage or discourage the congregation of groups in public spaces as appropriate.

Artwork within public spaces should be considered early in the design and planning process rather than as an 'add on' at the end of the project. Artworks incorporated within a development can bring added value to a scheme and can also help to create memorable places. Artwork often works well when it is site specific and related to local events or traditions, but this should not exclude innovation or ideas along other themes.

### Materials

The use of high quality, robust materials in public space is encouraged, particularly if they have an association with the local area. For surface treatments a small palette of related products, which is used to create a continuity of materials within a space, is one way to achieve a high quality environment.

The type of material used for surface treatments should be appropriate to its function, such as where greater pedestrian movement is expected, or where vehicles and pedestrians might share the surface. Surface treatments should be useable in all types of weather conditions and should not create conditions where people might slip or fall on them.

Access and movement within public spaces for people with a disability is a vitally important consideration. The use of tactile surface materials, ramps and other items to aid the disabled should adhere to the appropriate guidelines and in particular the Disability Discrimination Act. Early consultation with representatives from local disabled groups on these matters is recommended.

### Landscape

Landscaping includes 'hard' elements – surfacing, street furniture, seating, stairs and ramps etc – and 'soft' elements such as grass, trees, shrub planting and water features. These should all contribute to the distinctiveness and overall quality of a place. Care should be taken in the design and siting of these items. The choice of appropriate, durable materials at the design stage, the skill of those who construct the landscape and regular maintenance, will all help to keep public spaces looking and functioning at their best.

The microclimate in the location of new or improved public spaces should be analysed and responded to, with particular attention being paid to the sun path and areas that are windy. This might influence the location of future development, e.g. the positioning of buildings so public space is orientated towards the sun at lunchtimes or early in the evening.



**University Square**

This important public space links the cathedral quarter and Coventry University Campus. It is a key nodal point in the progression through public open space in the city centre for visitors, students and local people. The transition between the two areas is achieved by the use of a continuous shared surface across which pedestrians, cyclists and authorised vehicles are allowed to pass. Sculptural granite spheres mark out the vehicular route for pedestrian safety.

The proximity of the square to Coventry Cathedral and the University Campus required the design and specification of high quality, durable materials that are complementary to those in the surrounding area. This included the use of a green slate to match that found on Coventry University's Alan Berry building and sandstone to match the Cathedral Quarter environs. A 28 jet fountain, high quality street furniture and lighting features have been incorporated in the space which create activity and add visual interest. Existing trees surrounding the space were retained to define the square, provide shade and shelter.



Green open space in the heart of the city  
**Priority Gardens**



High quality residential street  
**Daimler Green**



Activity generated by external seating area  
**Lower Precinct**



Fountain acts as a focal point, promotes activity and provides a place to sit

Precinct Cross





# CONNECTIONS

Making places that inter-connect  
and are easy to move through

# 4

All towns and cities function on a network of connected routes and spaces, this is the case in the centre and in the suburbs. This movement framework should allow journeys to be made in a direct and efficient manner by either public or private transport, bicycle or on foot. It is usual for a hierarchy of routes to exist within urban areas, each of which generally has a distinct character, determined by the type and amount of traffic travelling along it, as well as the physical characteristics of these routes.

Consideration should be given to:

#### Integration

New development should provide routes that integrate with existing ones. Where none exist, logical, direct connections, made safer by design, should be provided from within the development to other areas. In some developments it will be appropriate to rethink routes and connections where existing ones are inadequate or inappropriate.

Transport interchanges can help promote the use of public transport by providing convenient connections between different modes of travel and access to shops and services. Major interchanges can often be destinations in their own right and their role can be reinforced by high density, mixed use developments that benefit from this type of location.

The time it takes to get to public transport from new development should be minimal so as to encourage alternative modes of travel to the car.

Pedestrian, bicycle and vehicular transport should be accommodated safely at broadly the same level, rather than using subways or bridges. Where it is appropriate and feasible, vehicles can be hidden from view or defer to the pedestrian and cyclist. Clashes between pedestrians and cyclists should be avoided where possible by providing a clear physical definition of the space allocated for each use – pedestrian, cyclist and vehicular.

#### Character and Hierarchy

Various types of routes can be used on the edges of, or within, new development. The width of these routes, height of buildings lining them and the type of activity along the routes all contribute to their character, and should be varied appropriately. Boulevards, for example, should be wide, tree lined and have buildings of at least four to six storeys along them as a minimum requirement.

#### Urban Grain

A finer grain of streets and spaces helps to create and sustain a more diverse range of activities and encourages walking within urban areas. Blocks of solid development that it is not possible to pass through form barriers to movement. Permeability should not however compromise the security of businesses or residents.

#### Traffic Calming

In some cases it will be appropriate to design measures into new development that can reduce traffic speeds. This might be the case in residential developments or certain city centre schemes. Using buildings or landscaping to limit forward visibility will be appropriate in some cases, physical constraints such as speed tables, humps or cushions can also be effective. These measures should be considered early in the design process, though some will not be appropriate if the road is to be used by buses.

**Parkside**

A large residential development focused around a central green space. The development's structure is based on an irregular grid, with perimeter blocks of housing forming a connected network of streets and a central square. Main routes in and out of the development are logical and integrate with their surroundings. The height and type of dwellings is varied to aid orientation and movement. Shared vehicular and pedestrian routes, shown in white, and pedestrian only routes, shown in blue, provide logical and direct ways of moving through and around the development.



Pedestrian route between old and new  
**Priory Gardens**



Clearly defined pedestrian route  
**Parkside**

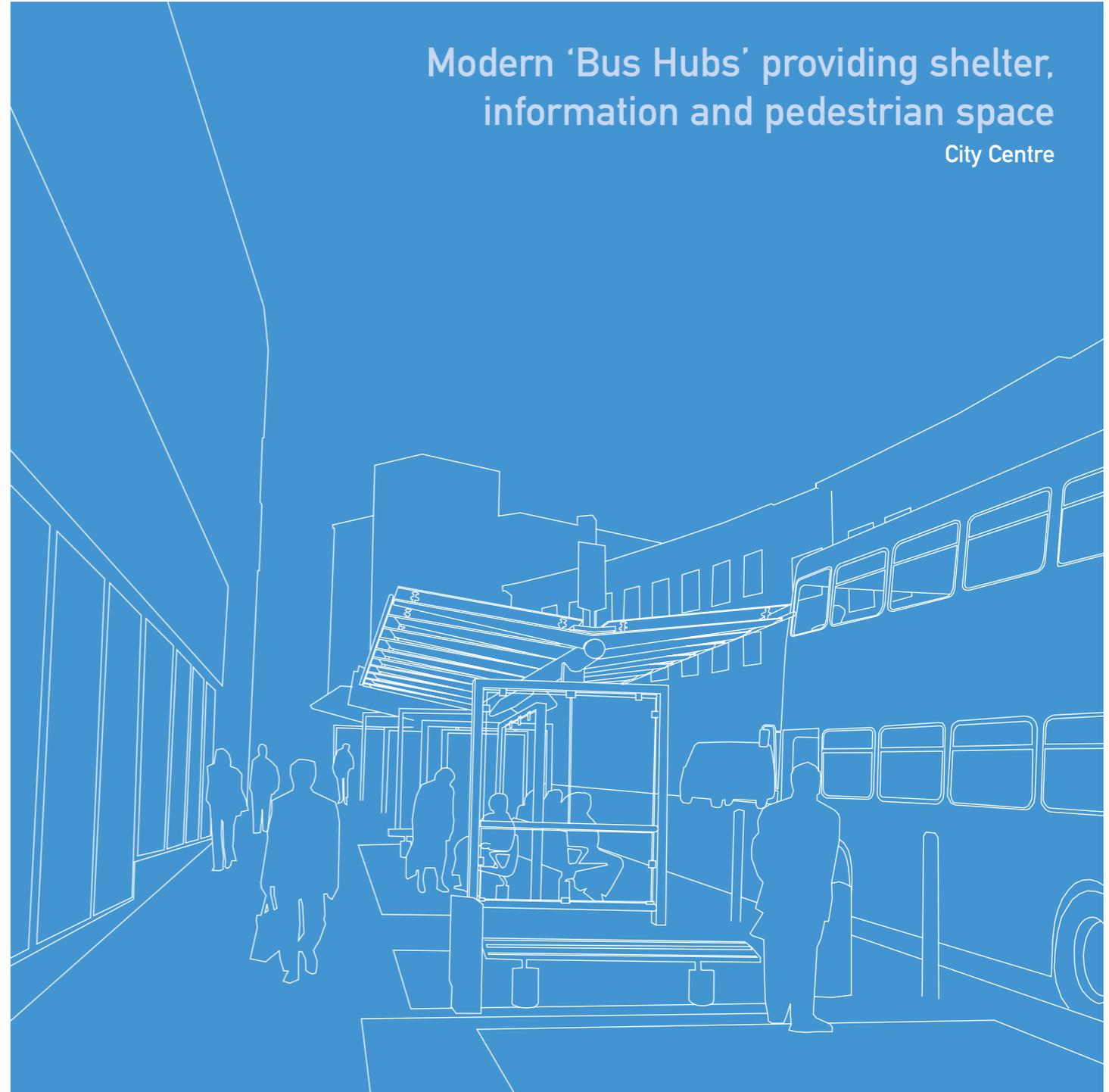


Shared vehicular and pedestrian space  
**University Square**



Development should encourage green travel  
**City Centre**

**Modern 'Bus Hubs' providing shelter, information and pedestrian space**  
**City Centre**



# LEGIBILITY

Ensuring that developments are readily understood by users

## 5



Developments should be designed to assist navigation within them and their surroundings for pedestrians and vehicular users. Routes that are clear, direct and logically connect with other routes are desirable. The avoidance of barriers to movement and dead ends is important. One way to create easily navigable urban areas is to use a 'grid' of streets, this might be a regular, rectilinear grid, or an irregular and more organic network.

Within urban areas people often use physical features to find their way around, these are generally referred to as landmarks and come in various forms. They can be large objects that are visible from miles around, such as the three spires in Coventry city centre, or smaller local landmarks such as a distinctive building or a piece of public art. The location of these landmarks is important in providing visual linkage through the built environment and creating focal points along vistas. Routes, built form and the location of landmarks influence the ease of understanding of an area; the 'legibility' of a place. Designing these elements to work together helps to create a more coherent urban form.

Consideration should be given to:

### Existing Views

New development should respect existing views and vistas. It would be inappropriate to place development in locations that obscure existing landmarks or have an adverse effect on their setting and skyline. Developments that can provide new views, or enhance views to existing landmarks are welcomed, as is the removal of buildings obscuring existing landmarks.

### New Landmarks

Development that can provide a new landmark is welcomed. This might be the entire development, in the form of a tall building, providing it is in an appropriate location and complies with the other principles and concepts in this document. Landmarks might also be provided by features on a building e.g. an entrance, roof treatment, or window arrangement.

Corners of buildings present opportunities for creating landmark features. They can often be made taller than other parts of the building and should present active frontage on all sides.

Free standing items and landscape features can aid navigation in urban environments, these might include avenues of trees, water features, sculptures and murals. Public art is a particularly good way of creating legible environments. Artists can work with architects and designers to create large scale interventions such as the Whittle Arch or create smaller elements such as paving patterns, street furniture and signage.

### Signage

Clear signage is important in urban areas, this should be provided as part of new development and in addition to landmark features. Signage can include street nameplates, finger posts, information panels, maps and banners. Signage should be well designed, robust and incorporate lighting if required. It is important to create a continuity of signage within new developments. Signage that can help the disabled such as tactile maps or 'talking' signs are encouraged. Information on signage can be found in the Coventry Streetscape, Signing and Information Strategy.

### Lighting

At night, lighting key routes and landmarks helps to increase the legibility of urban areas and can also bring about a sense of safety and security. Feature lighting can act as a landmark in its own right. This might involve lighting important buildings, such as the three spires in the city centre, or lighting buildings as part of an overall strategy, such as the weather project in the city centre. More information can be found in the Lighting Strategy for Coventry city centre.

Residential development should provide legible routes; closure of vista and creation of new focal point  
**Daimler Green**



Gateway markers at key entrances to the city  
**A46**



Light wall – public art installation  
**Corporation Street**

One of the aims of the Phoenix Initiative was to create a clear and distinctive route between the Cathedral Quarter and a new events space. This has been achieved with the phased construction of Priory Gardens, Priory Visitor Centre, Priory Place and finally Millennium Place, spanned by the Whittle Arch. See plan and photos adjacent.



Dramatic public art gives identity to a place, while the form of development links to other spaces  
**Priory Place**



# ADAPTABILITY

Encouraging developments which can adapt to changing social, technological, economic and market conditions

# 6



The ability of buildings to adapt to different uses can prolong their life and reduce the need for the wholesale clearance of areas judged to be unsuitable for new purposes. This means that character can be retained while uses and tenants change. Many older buildings have proved suitable for conversion to new uses, examples include warehouses converted for residential use and large houses converted into offices.

Changes in society have a great deal of impact on building requirements, for example recent demographic shifts have led to a need for more dwellings for single people and for large or extended families. The speed at which technology changes also influences building form.

New buildings should also be able to adapt to the changing needs of users. Building to 'lifetime living' standards would mean that a person could live in the same property for their entire life and it would accommodate them if they became disabled in some way or when, as a result of old age, they became less mobile. New development will be subject to the Disability Discrimination Act as a matter of course.

Consideration should be given to:

## Layout

The network of routes and spaces within new development should be able to accommodate new uses in the future. A finer grain of development is more readily adaptable in the future than a large single use block. Infrastructure requirements may also change over time and with new uses. This should be considered when designing new development.

## Form

Robust and simple building forms are more easily converted to new uses. Floor to ceiling heights and block depth should be designed with a variety of uses in mind. However, a diversity of built form is still desirable and a standard 'adaptable' solution may not be appropriate everywhere.

Houses should be designed in such a way as to make them extendable either horizontally or vertically and perhaps within their roof space, depending on location.



Former cinema converted to performing arts facility  
**Ellen Terry Building**  
Coventry University



School converted to exhibition/conference venue  
**Blue Coat School**



Factory converted to teaching and office space  
**William Morris Building**  
Coventry University



**Tower Court**

The Tower Court office development is situated at the junction of Lockhurst Lane and Foleshill Road. It is located on the Foleshill Enterprise Park that was formerly the headquarters of Courtaulds. An existing building was extensively refurbished and now provides four floors of modern office accommodation. Features such as the full height glazed screen wall and the retention of the majority of the original structure combine to make an attractive landmark on one of the main routes in and out of the city centre.

Modern structure incorporated into existing building to provide high quality office space

Tower Court



# DIVERSITY

## 7 Promoting diversity through mixes of use which work together to create vital and viable places



If the urban environment is to remain active and vibrant for most of the day, a mixture and variety of uses is required within compact areas. This may include mixing uses vertically within buildings, horizontally along streets or as small zones of specific uses located adjacent to each other. More people doing different activities all contribute to the vitality and viability of places.

Mixing uses has economic benefits as well as social ones. Locations that mix a variety of residential, commercial, retail, community and leisure development ensure that there are employees for jobs, demand for services, health facilities, schools etc, customers for shops, and audiences for entertainment.

Consideration should be given to:

### The Mix

Deciding on the correct mix of uses in any new development can be difficult; it might be determined by site-specific circumstances, market requirements or site constraints. In some cases new development may consist of a single use that might be required in an area where it does not currently exist – such as residential development in the city centre and retail or community uses in suburban areas.

In the city centre developments providing uses that prolong activity throughout the day are welcomed. This might include locating bars, restaurants or leisure uses close to office developments to encourage evening activities for employees.

It is also important to consider how uses relate to each other. Employment or leisure developments may not always be appropriate neighbours for residential use, but can be made to work successfully in certain situations.

### Form and Tenure

The layout of new development should make a variety of uses viable, it should be integrated into the existing urban structure and have good links to public transport.

Built form should be suitable for a variety of uses that may change over time. Adaptable buildings are encouraged. Live work units are one way to mix uses and are suitable for use by people requiring smaller spaces such as those setting up new businesses.

A variety of tenures can encourage diversity. In residential development providing homes for private sale, rent and sale through assisted means such as housing associations is a way of doing this. These homes should also be mixed together in new development in order to promote social inclusion. A survey of local needs can be used to determine an appropriate mix of tenures on a site specific basis.



Ground floor restaurant, upper floor apartments  
[Ribbon Factory](#)



**Priory Place**

This development combines residential, retail and leisure uses in a series of buildings grouped around a central pedestrian square. Activity is encouraged through ground floor leisure and retail uses such as shops, bars, and restaurants facing both the square and the external streets surrounding the development. The upper floors are given over to apartments, including penthouses on the top floor. The development provides pedestrian links across the main square to other parts of the city centre such as the cathedral quarter and Millennium Place – an events space outside the Coventry Transport Museum.

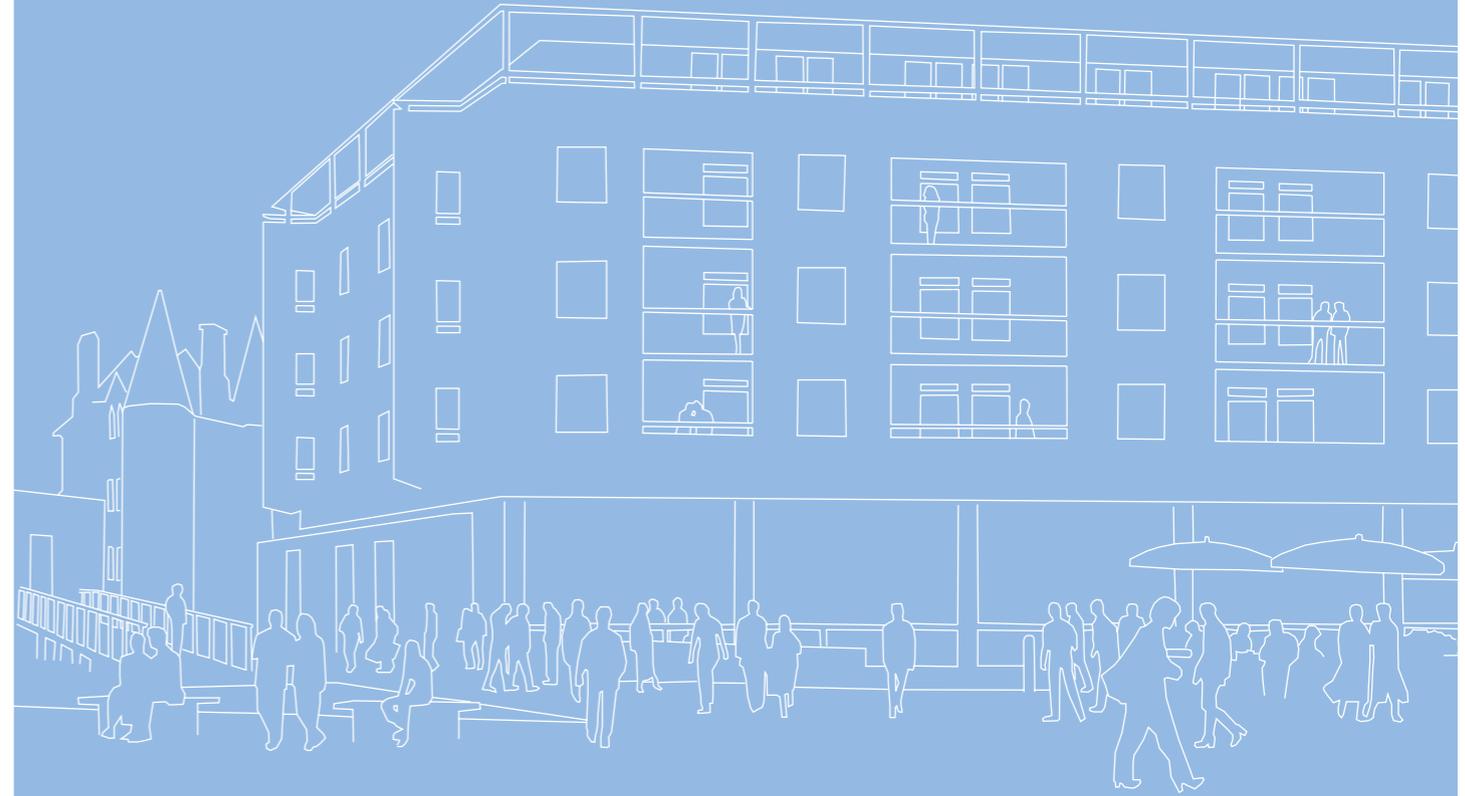


Live/work units  
**Electric Wharf**



Vibrant mixed use development combines many of the principles of urban design to create an active, well designed place

Priory Place





# SUSTAINABILITY

Ensuring that developments are sustainable in terms of their design, layout and density

8

The aim of promoting sustainability is to ensure that development meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The government has committed itself to creating sustainable communities and sustainable development; these concepts are explained in more detail in the draft consultation paper on Planning Policy Statement 1 (PPS1, 2004) and in the government publication Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future, February 2003.

The choice of development site is an important consideration and re-using previously developed land (brownfield) is encouraged, providing it is appropriate for the type of development proposed. The approach to developing a brownfield site should be no different to any other type of site and the principles embodied in this guidance should still be followed.

The design of new development should involve thinking about transport within it as well as to and from it. A key issue is whether private car use can be reduced and more journeys made using public transport, by walking or by cycling.

Consideration should be given to:

#### Design

- Use local, natural materials
- Design for easy or low maintenance – buildings and landscape
- Use passive and active solar gain technologies
- Use recycled and renewable materials
- Convert buildings to new uses
- Design for natural light and ventilation
- Use sustainable water management
- Insulate to retain heat and reduce noise
- Provide cycle parking facilities and showers
- Design compact building forms to reduce heat loss
- Consider combined heating and power plants for larger developments

#### Density

- Build at higher densities in appropriate and sustainable locations e.g. transport interchanges
- Build at densities able to support a range of uses and facilities
- Increase vitality through activity concentration
- Higher density development in appropriate locations should follow the recommendations in this document with respect to siting, scale and massing etc.

#### Layout

- Provide direct access to public transport
- Consider community safety
- Design direct routes for walking and cycling
- Design spaces that reduce wind speeds and enhance microclimate
- Design spaces that reduce vehicle speeds and circulation
- Protect the existing natural features and improve their ecological value
- Protect and enhance biodiversity
- Link to Green Space and recreation facilities (existing and proposed)
- Strategic planting along road corridors can reduce pollution levels



**Coventry University Library**

This building was designed with energy efficiency and sustainability in mind from the outset. Central to its concept is the natural ventilation system; fresh air enters into the ground floor, and ten brick towers around the perimeter extract stale air using a stacking effect. The new library is technically innovative and imaginative in architectural terms and cost savings are proving that incorporating energy efficiency need not be an expensive option. The University is now planning more buildings using energy efficient concepts.



Maximising solar gain  
**Westwood Training  
and Conference Centre**

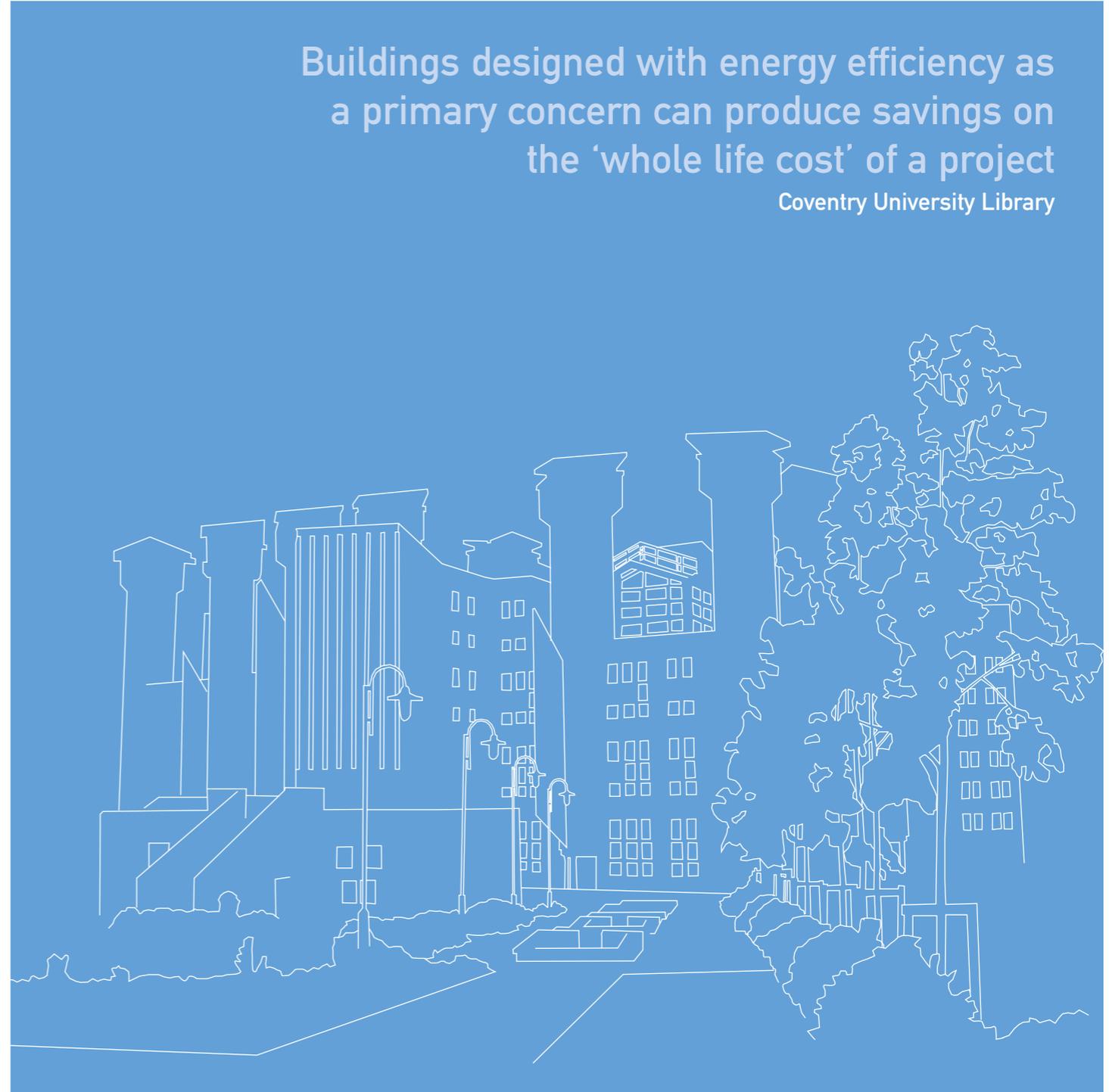


Live/work development  
reduces the need to travel  
**Electric Wharf**



Buildings designed with energy efficiency as a primary concern can produce savings on the 'whole life cost' of a project

Coventry University Library



# COMBINING THE URBAN DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Development that incorporates and complies with the eight urban design principles explained in this guidance will make an improved contribution to the built environment in Coventry. These principles are set out again below:

- 1 Enhancing townscape and landscape character by reflecting locally distinct patterns of development
- 2 Strengthening the continuity of street frontages and the enclosure of space by development that clearly defines the boundaries between public and private space
- 3 Providing high quality public spaces which are safe uncluttered, active and easily identifiable
- 4 Making places that inter-connect and are easy to move through
- 5 Ensuring that developments are readily understood by users
- 6 Encouraging developments which can adapt to changing social, technological, economic and market conditions
- 7 Promoting diversity through mixes of use which work together to create vital and viable places
- 8 Ensuring that developments are sustainable in terms of their design, layout and density

The urban design principles set out and explained in this document have no order of priority – they each carry equal weight. It is important that all the principles are considered early in the planning and design phases of development and adhered to where possible.

Three examples are shown on these pages that incorporate some of the above principles; a residential apartment block, a mixed use development in the city centre and a residential development combining individual dwellings and apartment blocks. These examples are not necessarily the 'perfect' solution to the type of development they represent and they do have some weaknesses in urban design terms that are discussed. It would not necessarily be appropriate to repeat them in another location.

The residential apartment block makes a considerable contribution to the built environment, not least through the high quality of its architecture. This development is a good example of principle 2, it also incorporates elements of principles 3, 5 and 8. Although the development does broadly follow the line of the street, it sits off the back edge of the footpath and introduces a strip of landscape that does not appear to be either public or private space. Separate access to the ground floor apartments could have been provided directly off Manor House Drive to bring more activity to the street and to define this strip by giving ownership to it.

Apartment building in a City Centre setting



Balconies and windows to front provide natural surveillance onto the street

Continuous built form defines the street

Development respects the height of existing adjacent buildings without being constrained by them

'Perimeter block' type of development allows secure space to the rear for parking or gardens

The mixed use development in the city centre is set in a particularly sensitive location and therefore had to be of a very high quality. This development is a particularly good example of principles 1 and 7. It also incorporates elements of principles 2, 5 and 6. There is little to criticise here in architectural terms and as an infill development this is a very good example of how to respond to the surrounding character of an area without resorting to pastiche.

The new build residential development is on a much bigger scale than the other examples and as such incorporates elements of all the urban design principles above. What is particularly good is the way in which the central square – surrounded by buildings of an increased scale – organises the layout and provides a focal point, a good example of principles 3, 4, 5 and 8. Unfortunately, the definition of the perimeter blocks break down in places and although the development is based on a layout designed for ease of movement through it and within it, there are a number of dead ends that are not recommended. The parking courtyards to the rear of some areas of the development might have been more overlooked which could have been achieved by buildings fronting directly onto them.

Mixed use development in a sensitive city centre location

Height respects adjacent buildings

Continuity of building line along the street is achieved by following the line established by adjacent buildings

Materials and form respect the character of the area and the adjacent buildings

Residential development set out around a central landscaped square

Increases in the scale of buildings from 2 to 3 & 4 storeys emphasises the importance of the central square and the main routes through the development.

The irregular grid layout creates legible, direct routes through the development that integrate with surrounding street network

Roof design creates a landmark feature on the skyline and reflects adjacent built form

Windows provide opportunity for natural surveillance and add interest to the facades

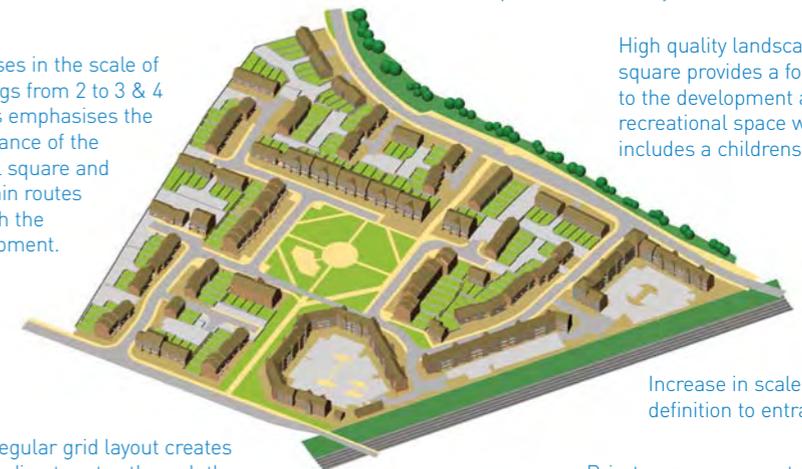


Architectural emphasis on the corner provides a landmark and an active façade on each side

Active ground floor use brings life to the street

Dedicated landscaped routes have been created for pedestrians and cyclists

High quality landscaped square provides a focal point to the development and recreational space which includes a childrens play area



All buildings front onto streets

Private, secure space to the rear of development is used for car parking or gardens

# URBAN DESIGN IN THE PLANNING PROCESS

This guide is intended to aid the improvement of Coventry's built environment by prescribing qualities for urban form, space, activity and patterns of movement in advance of the detailed design stage of development. There are a variety of guidance documents that can be used to steer developers and their designers in planning and designing development, the difference between them being their emphasis. They can be prepared by public, private and other interests, although most is prepared by or for local authorities.

Urban design guidance can minimise uncertainty, improve efficiency in the planning process, and form a stepping-stone between the provisions of the development plan and the requirements of a planning application. It can be given formal status (Supplementary Planning Guidance or a Supplementary Planning Document) if it is consistent with policies in the Development Plan (or the Local Development Framework), has been the subject of a public consultation and has been formally adopted by the local authority – Coventry City Council.

## Urban Design Frameworks

A document indicating how planning and design policies and principles should be implemented in a clearly defined area where there is a need to control, guide and promote change. Such areas include urban quarters and transport corridors. They are used to coordinate more detailed masterplans and development briefs for specific sites. They bring together recommendations on the form of design acceptable within that area and illustrate the visual policies within which urban design qualities are to be co-ordinated and re-enforced. They should include a two dimensional vision of future infrastructure requirements.

## Masterplans

A document that charts the masterplanning process and explains how a site or series of sites will be developed. They describe how the proposal will be implemented and set out the costs, phasing and timing of development. The spatial masterplan is a synthesis of the design-led approach to urban development, and establishes a three-dimensional framework or visual 'model' that allows visualisation of public spaces and shows how they are connected; defines the height and massing of buildings and the relationship between buildings and public spaces; determines the distribution of uses; and controls movement patterns.

## Development Briefs

A document providing clear guidance on how a specific site of significant size or sensitivity should be developed. One of the most effective means of articulating the design principles for a site and implementing design policies. Whilst not presenting the final solution they should reduce the alternatives to those acceptable in planning and design terms.

## Design Statements

The Coventry Development Plan promotes design statements (Policy BE3) as part of the planning application requirements for major new developments or redevelopment.

A design statement should include the following:

- An explanation of the design concept and principles;
- An outline of how these will be reflected in the development layout, density, scale, landscape and visual appearance;
- An explanation of the purpose of the proposed development and how the design relates to the site and the wider area;
- An explanation of how the development will meet the urban design policies outlined in policy BE1;
- Any relevant Supplementary Planning Guidance. This will take the form of design guides for topics or areas or site specific development briefs; and
- Plans and drawings should be submitted to ensure that the design can be properly assessed. These should include a location plan, plan of existing layout, plan of proposed layout, floor plans, elevations and cross sections.

## Design Guides

Documents providing general design guidance in relation to particular topics and uses applicable over a wide area. They are amongst the most common mechanisms used to influence the design of development. There are design guides for buildings (e.g. extensions), streetscape and landscape design (e.g. public space and lighting) and for specific uses (e.g. residential).

## Design Codes

A set of more prescriptive requirements which may be used to regulate issues such as the dimensioning of blocks and plots, the widths of streets and squares, scale and massing of buildings, access and infrastructure. They may also include detailed palettes of materials that should be used in the construction of new buildings or landscape treatments. Design codes should be exacting in their urban design requirements while allowing more design freedom in creating individual buildings or landscapes. Design codes can be adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance and be treated as a material consideration in the planning process.

## Pre Application Discussions

Pre application discussions are recommended for applicants as they can help expose potential conflicts with City Council objectives at an early stage in the development process. The City Council will endeavour not to make this a long and drawn out process or to make unreasonable demands of applicants.

## Format and Content

Every site is unique and each guidance document will be similarly unique. They are necessarily non-standard products. What is included will depend on the scale, sensitivity and complexity of the site, on the type of guidance document proposed, and the proposed development itself. Many of the references in this guide provide extensive checklists of possible content, intended as an aid in choosing priorities.

## Firmness and Flexibility

All types of guidance will establish a framework within which the developer/architect may design. The intention is not to restrict creativity but to provide a springboard of general principle as to the form of development that will be appropriate. The minimum amount of control should be applied, and a clear distinction made between firm requirements, indicative suggestions and supporting information. Indicative suggestions and illustrations should be included to show the development opportunities the authority would like explored by the developer, but these will not necessarily be the only acceptable solutions. In proposing alternatives, developers should not contradict the principles of urban design set out in this document.

## Consultation

Involving key stakeholders and the wider public in the preparation of guidance documents and planning new development is essential. A variety of ways exist to facilitate clear communication, consultation and participation between all parties affected by development, 'Visioning' events and community workshops are two examples of these.

At its most simple level, a community participation process should ensure that people:

- Have access to information
- Can put forward their own ideas and feel confident that there is a process for considering ideas
- Can take an active part in developing proposals and options
- Can comment on formal proposals
- Get feedback and be informed about progress and outcomes

(Community Involvement in Planning: The Governments Objectives ODPM, Feb 2004)

Consultation should be done as early in the planning and design stages of a development as possible. Bringing together people who may have a range of conflicting interests helps facilitate collaboration and consensus building.

# APPENDIX

## THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

### Introduction

The draft version of this urban design guidance document was the subject of an extensive public consultation process. This was a requirement in order for the document to be formally adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance and for it to carry weight in determining planning applications. In addition to the general public, a number of local and national organisations whose work the guidance may affect were also consulted. The consultation period lasted for 8 weeks, beginning on Friday the 26th of March 2004 and ending on Friday the 21st of May 2004.

The preparation of the draft version of the urban design guidance included a meeting with members of the Coventry By Design forum. The forum is made up of members of the public with an interest in design and planning issues. Nine members of the forum formed a design advisory panel that was consulted on the direction that Coventry City Council intended to take with the guidance in terms of its style and content. This meeting, held on the 17th of July 2003, was in effect the first stage of the public consultation.

### The Consultation Process

The launch of the public consultation was initiated with a letter to members of the Coventry By Design forum, Councillors, statutory consultees (invited to comment on all planning applications) and agents who have submitted planning applications in the past. This list totalled 346 people or organisations. A detailed list of all those who were made aware of the consultation by letter is available from Coventry City Council. The letter invited people to comment on the draft urban design guidance and respond to the city council with their comments by the end of the consultation period. Those in receipt of a written invitation to comment were informed that the document was available to view by one of the following methods:

- **Downloading the document in Adobe Acrobat (pdf) format from the Coventry City Council website**
- **Viewing a hardcopy of the document in the Council House or Civic Centre 4**
- **Viewing a hardcopy of the document in the Central Library on Smithford Way**
- **Viewing a hardcopy of the document in one of the 15 local libraries in Coventry**

To publicise the existence of the draft urban design guidance further and to invite comments from the general public, additional publicity was undertaken. This comprised of two articles on the guidance in local newspapers, the Coventry Evening Telegraph and the Observer (a free newspaper). Information on how to view the document in the locations listed above was included in the articles. The draft urban design guidance was also given a highly prominent place on the front page of City Council's website.

To comply with Council guidelines the document was available in various formats. Large print versions were available to download from the council website and by contacting council officers. Copies of the document were requested in Braille and digital formats and both of these were sent out to members of the public. Council officers attended the Disabled Peoples Development Advisory Group to publicise the urban design guidance and request comments on it, copies of the document were given out at this meeting. A number of copies of the document were also available to view at the meeting of the Coventry By Design forum on the 6th of May 2004.

### Response to the Consultation

In total, 18 detailed written responses were received; a 5% rate of return on the number of invitations to comment sent out. A response rate of 10% is considered to be good for a public consultation of this nature and on this subject. All of the responses complemented the overall aim of the urban design guidance – to improve the quality of the built environment in Coventry. The majority of respondents were also complimentary about the content and style of the document, including the use of photographs and sketches of good examples of urban design from Coventry. Although the total amount of responses was disappointing, the quality of the responses received made a valuable contribution to the final document.

The organisations the respondents represented and their specific interests are listed below, the identity of individuals has been kept confidential.

Organisation	Interest
British Waterways	Canals and navigable Rivers
CCC Planning Policy	Planning
Civil Aviation Authority	Safety Regulation & Aerodrome Standards
Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE)	Architecture and the Built Environment
Coventry Resident No 1	Development in Coventry
Coventry Resident No 2	Development in Coventry
Coventry Society / R99	Development in Coventry, urban design and the community
Disabled Peoples Development Advisory Group	The Disabled
Earlsdon Conservation and Development ECAD	Development in Coventry (specific interest, development in Earlsdon)
English Heritage (West Midlands Region)	Conservation and enhancement of the historic environment
Environment Agency	The Environment
Pegasus Planning Group on behalf of Persimmon Homes (South Midlands)	Commercial House builder / Developer
The Ramblers Association (Warwickshire Area)	Walking
RIBA – Coventry and Warwickshire Society of Chartered Architects	Architecture
Rochester Road Area Residents Association	Development in Coventry
Sport England	Sport and Recreation
Talking Birds	Public Art
West Midlands Police	Reduction of crime and the fear of crime

### Coventry City Council's Response to the Comments

The vast majority of respondents were complimentary about the intention, style and content of the draft version of the urban design guidance. Most comments related to the respondents own areas of interest and how the guidance could incorporate more references to these. Where possible the draft version was amended to include these references either through text or illustrative examples. 72% of suggestions/comments made by consultees resulted in an amendment to the document. In cases where changes were not made following a comment it was felt that the request was inappropriate or that the document already addressed the point being made.

It is felt that the public consultation has been a worthwhile and useful exercise. The respondents have clearly spent time carefully considering the draft document and how it relates to them and the organisations they represent. The suggestions and comments they have made have led to a revised document that is an improvement on the draft version. A detailed list of comments made by respondents and the responses to these by Council officers is available in the public report presented to the planning committee on the 29th of July 2004 regarding this guidance document.

# FURTHER ADVICE

## National Guidance and Strategy

Consultation Paper on Planning Policy Statement 1: Creating Sustainable Communities (ODPM, 2004)  
Safer Places: The planning System and Crime Prevention (ODPM & Home Office, 2004)  
Protecting Design Quality in Planning (CABE, 2003)  
The Value of Housing Design and Layout (CABE & ODPM, 2003)  
Guidance on Tall Buildings (English Heritage & CABE, March 2003)  
The Value of Good Design (CABE, 2002)  
Urban Design Guidance: Urban design frameworks, Development Briefs and Masterplans (Urban Design Group, 2002)  
The Value of Urban Design (CABE & DETR, 2001)  
Better Places to Live: By design (CABE & DTLR, September 2001)  
Building in context: New development in historic areas (English Heritage & CABE, 2001)  
Our towns and cities: the future; Delivering an urban Renaissance (DETR, Nov 2000)  
Urban Design Compendium (English Partnerships, August 2000)  
By Design: Urban design in the planning system: towards better practice (CABE & DTLR May 2000)  
Towards an Urban Renaissance (Urban Task Force, June 1999)  
Crime and Disorder Act 1998 (Home Office, 1998)  
Planning Policy Guidance Note 1: General Policy and Principles (DOE, 1997)  
Disability Discrimination Act 1995

## Local Guidance

Coventry Development Plan (2001)  
Coventry Urban Design Study (1999)  
Coventry Streetscape, Signing and Information Strategy (1999)  
Lighting Strategy for Coventry City Centre (1998)

## Useful Internet sites

[www.urban.odpm.gov.uk](http://www.urban.odpm.gov.uk) Urban Policy Unit; Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM)  
[www.cabe.org.uk](http://www.cabe.org.uk) Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE)  
[www.udg.org.uk](http://www.udg.org.uk) Urban Design Group (UDG)  
[www.riba.org](http://www.riba.org) Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA)  
[www.rtpi.org.uk](http://www.rtpi.org.uk) Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI)  
[www.l-i.org.uk](http://www.l-i.org.uk) Landscape Institute (LI)  
[www.securedbydesign.com](http://www.securedbydesign.com) Association of Chief Police Officers  
[www.disability.gov.uk](http://www.disability.gov.uk) Disability Unit, Department for Work and Pensions  
[www.homeoffice.gov.uk](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk) The Home Office



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