



urban
practitioners



INTRODUCTION

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Dacorum Borough Council has commissioned Urban Practitioners to produce an Urban Design Assessment for Dacorum's three towns – Hemel Hempstead, Berkhamsted and Tring – and three large villages - Kings Langley, Bovington and Markyate. The Urban Design Assessment will assist in the formulation of specific urban design policies within the Council's new Local Development Framework and subsequent supplementary planning documents.

WHAT IS AN 'URBAN DESIGN ASSESSMENT'?

The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) has defined urban design 'as 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' (from By Design: Urban Design in the Planning System).

The Urban Design Assessment Criteria section of this report describes in greater detail the criteria Urban Practitioners have employed in assessing the towns and large villages of Dacorum.

This study has been undertaken concurrently with and is complementary to other work, including: Urban Capacity; Employment Floorspace; Indoor and Outdoor Leisure Facilities; Open Space; Retail Capacity; and Urban Nature Conservation studies.

STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

The report is divided into a number of separate reports:-

Borough Report

This sets out the borough-wide context for Dacorum. It provides an introduction to the individual town and village urban design assessments and sets out the urban design criteria against which the settlements will be assessed. The policy context section reviews existing national, regional and local policies which

have a bearing on the Dacorum Urban Design Assessment. Key 'gaps' in the coverage of current Local Plan policies are highlighted and suggestions made as to how these could be addressed through the new Local Development Framework.

This includes the need for additional advice on:-

- Protection of strategic view corridors
- Building lines and orientation
- Protection and enhancement of linkages between areas of open space
- Backland development
- Linkages between high quality design and density and its impact upon character and views

The study also recommends that the existing supplementary planning guidance on 'Development in Residential Areas' is updated and extended to cover all settlements within the Borough.

Individual Settlement Reports

Individual reports have been produced – one for each of the six towns and large villages

studied. These reports set out the settlements' basic characteristics, including location, transport connections, population and social composition. The policy context section summarises policy issues pertinent to each settlement that have not been covered in the borough-wide document. A brief historical context is also given.

A strategy plan and set of settlement principles are provided for each of the towns and villages. These define the broad 'Urban Design Zones' into which the settlements have been sub-divided. These Urban Design Zones have been created on the basis of existing characteristics, reflecting the morphology, density and typologies of each area, and an understanding of how these areas should be viewed in the light of any potential development or regeneration of the zone.

The Urban Design Assessment provides the baseline evidence and analysis which has shaped the strategy plan, settlement principles and urban design guidelines.

Each report also includes a summary of the Consultation Workshop for that settlement. Many of the stakeholder comments have been used as evidence in the urban design assessments.

Town and Village Photo Logs

These documents provide an extensive photographic record of each of the urban design issues considered within the individual settlement reports.

URBAN DESIGN ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

The intention of the Assessment is to understand the major urban design issues confronting each large village and town that will inform decisions relating to potential development, conservation and change.

The criteria relevant to these decisions have been divided into five major categories, as seen below. These have been analysed through writing, photographic study, mapping and diagramming.

1) MAKING PLACES (MP)

Each of the towns and large villages being assessed has its own distinct character, and the first set of criteria focuses on the key features that make each place unique. The criteria recognise that aspects of both the built and natural environment are significant in forming a town or village's identity and sense of place.

MP1 MATERIALS AND TEXTURES

A photographic study of distinctive and typical materials and textures.

MP2 LISTED BUILDINGS AND CONSERVATION AREAS
A map of listed buildings and Conservation Areas.

MP3 BUILDING HEIGHTS
A diagram of town or village centre building heights to provide a sense of scale.

MP4 DENSITY
A photographic study of typical building types in the residential areas of the settlement. This study will be followed by a more rigorous calculation and analysis of building densities in the final strategy. The classification for densities is based on Government guidance, reflecting advice in PPG3:

- Very low < 30 dph
- Low 30 - 40 dph
- Medium 40 - 50 dph
- High 50 - 60 dph
- Very high > 60 dph

MP5 TOPOGRAPHY
A diagram highlighting the topographical changes across the towns and villages.

2) CONTINUITY AND ENCLOSURE (CE)

The key criteria within 'Continuity and Enclosure' consider the various ways in which the street network, building frontages, and open spaces contribute to coherence and vitality. This category stresses the interconnection between building, street, and street network design on street life.

CE1 MORPHOLOGY
A diagram showing the basic morphology of the settlement to clarify permeability within the settlements.

CE2 BUILDING LINES / SETBACKS / GAPS
A diagram of the town or village centre to understand the conditions of the existing street building line.

CE3 BUILDING FRONTS/BACK ORIENTATION
A diagram of the settlement centre to understand the active and passive effect that buildings have on the high streets.

CE4 DESIGNATED OPEN SPACE

Mapping of the designated open spaces.

3) MAKING CONNECTIONS (MC)

The key criteria within 'Making Connections' explicitly analyses the movements within the towns and villages and the ease with which this circulation occurs.

MC1 LAND USE
A diagram showing the key land uses within the town and village centres with text describing the effect on movements and desire lines.

MC2 CIRCULATION DEMAND AND LINKAGES
A diagram showing the predominant pedestrian and vehicular movements, with emphasis added for paths with the greatest demand. (Information gathered through both observation and mapping at the consultation events).

MC3 OFF-STREET AND ONSTREET VEHICLE PARKING
A photographic study of practices in off-street and on-street parking.

MC4 WAYFINDING SIGNAGE

A photographic study of local signage.

4) QUALITY OF THE PUBLIC REALM (QPR)

This assessment category considers the impact of various elements of the environment, including both streetscape and natural elements, on the sense of security, safety, and overall coherence of the settlements.

QPR1 STREETSCAPE ELEMENTS

A photographic study of streetscape features, such as lighting, shopfronts, and fences / railings.

QPR2 NATURAL ELEMENTS IN OPEN SPACE

A photographic study of natural features.

5) LEGIBILITY (LE)

The key criteria within 'Making Connections' explicitly analyses the movements within the settlement and the ease with which this circulation occurs.

L1 VIEWS, VISTAS AND GATEWAYS

A diagram showing the topography in relation to key views, vistas (view corridors) and gateways.

L2 EDGES, PATHS, LANDMARKS AND CHARACTER AREAS

A legibility diagram presenting an analysis of current conditions in terms of primary paths, major edge conditions, significant landmarks, and surrounding character areas

BOROUGH-WIDE URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES

The following tables set out the broad urban design guidelines recommended for (a) large villages and (b) the towns within the Borough. It includes consideration of issues such as:-

- Building types
- Architectural styles
- Building heights
- Density
- Building lines
- Building orientation
- Pattern of open spaces
- Location of parking
- Design of infill and larger 'block' sites

The individual settlement reports provide more detailed guidance regarding the urban design guidelines principles for each individual town or large village. These reports include both a strategy plan and table of broad settlement principles. This settlement-wide guidance is then broken down further to the level of the individual 'Urban Design Zones.'

(a) BOROUGH-WIDE URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES – LARGE VILLAGES

	CRITERIA	GUIDELINE
MAKING CONNECTIONS	MP1: Materials and Textures	The use of local materials and styles should be encouraged. Particular materials noted as local to Dacorum villages include red brick, knapped flint, and slate and clay roof tiles. Many of the materials introduced from the 1950s onwards - such as wood siding or modern wirecut bricks - have been criticised by local residents.
	MP2: Listed buildings and Conservation Areas	The current listed buildings should be protected, in terms of their physical upkeep, the treatment of buildings and sites in their immediate vicinity and view corridors to them. Conservation Areas should strive for a consistency of character which extends to streetscape elements and furniture.
	MP3: Building Heights	The villages of Dacorum should generally be constrained to less than three storeys, with the exception of special consideration sites that add to the legibility of the village. Low building heights are critical for maintaining village character
	MP4: Density and Building Typology	Villages should attempt to create a general gradient of density extending from a village centre zone (high) to an inner zone (medium to high) to a semi-rural zone (low to medium) to a rural/peripheral zone (very low to low). The application of local building typologies would generally flow from this, such as the use of terraces for higher density areas, semi-detached for low-medium density areas and detached buildings for very low to low zones.
	MP5: Topographical studies	Dacorum has several river valleys coursing through it, and topography has had a significant impact on the morphology of the villages, creating distinct street patterns and key views. Development within the villages should continue to accentuate views from the valley sides into the village centres.

	CRITERIA	GUIDELINE
CONTINUITY AND ENCLOSURE	CE1: Morphology	The river valley topography has generally led to a street morphology with High Streets running parallel to the valley, distributor roads running up the valley sides perpendicular to the High Street, and residential access roads branching off from the distributor roads. This morphology should be continued where possible. The use of cul-de-sacs and dead-end streets should be minimised.
	CE2: Village Centre Morphology	The existing street morphology should accentuate the primacy of the High Street and the distributor routes that extend off from it. Residential access roads, particularly cul-de-sacs and dead-end roads, extending from the High Street, should be avoided.
	CE3: Building Lines and Pavements	Consistency in the building lines along each street should be emphasised. Generally, the village centre zone should have minimal setbacks, the inner zone should have, depending on the given street, minimal or medium setbacks, the semi-rural and peripheral zones should have medium to large setbacks.
	CE4: Building Orientation	Building entries should typically face the street, both to create an increased sense of security and added vitality to the public realm. New developments which result in backing f houses onto primary or district distributor roads should be avoided.
	CE5: Patterns of Open Space	Houses should have rear gardens that back onto other rear gardens as a means of maximising wildlife habitat, privacy and sunlight. New developments should consider the context when determining if front gardens are individual or communal (as individual front gardens are often critical to the character of an area).
MAKING CONNECTIONS	MC1: Land Use	Non-residential village centre land uses should be protected and enhanced where possible. The potential for flats above shops should be considered in village centres.
	MC2: Circulation, Demand and Linkages	The street hierarchy should consider the High Street within the village centre as a local distributor which encourages pedestrian activity and discourages traffic using the village as a bypass to avoid crowded 'A' roads. The High Streets outside of the village centres should be considered primary distributors for residents to leave the village. District distributors (also referred to as a secondary route) should generally extend from the High Street and primary distributors. Residential access roads (also referred to as tertiary routes) should generally branch off from the district distributors and not the High Street. Footpaths represent important circulation paths in the villages, and cycling routes should be encouraged.
	MC3: Parking	On-street parking should typically be avoided for primary and district distributors and encouraged for local distributors (High Streets) and residential access roads when street widths permit it and it does not impinge on the rural character. Newer developments may consider communal on-site parking, particularly if located off of district distributors.

	CRITERIA	GUIDELINE
QUALITY OF THE PUBLIC REALM	QPR1: Streetscape Elements	Streetscape elements should be used to reinforce the difference between the different urban design zones, the presence of a street hierarchy through traffic calming treatments, and the distinctiveness of Conservation Areas
	QPR2: Designated Open Land	Strong footpath links into the Green Belt should be encouraged.
LEGIBILITY	LE1: Vistas, Views, Gateways	Vistas into and from the Green Belt should be recognised and protected. View corridors along the High Streets and the Grand Union Canal and toward key orientation points should also be recognised and protected. Clear gateways into the villages should be established and marked by such features as gateway signage, key buildings and changes in streetscape treatment. .
	LE2: Edges, Paths, Nodes, Landmarks, Districts	Landmarks and districts should be clarified though co-ordinated streetscape treatment. Key nodes and gateways should be established.

NB: Some of the recommendations require the input of agencies external to the Borough Council.

(b) BOROUGH-WIDE URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES – TOWNS

	CRITERIA	GUIDELINE
MAKING CONNECTIONS	MP1: Materials and Textures	The use of local materials and styles should be encouraged. Particular materials noted as local to Dacorum towns include red brick, knapped flint and ceramic roof tiles. There should be opportunities for high-quality modern materials and styles, particularly with regard to commercial and civic buildings within the town centres.
	MP2: Listed buildings and Conservation Areas	The current listed buildings should be protected, in terms of their physical upkeep, the treatment of buildings and sites in their immediate vicinity and view corridors to them. Conservation Areas should strive for a consistency of character which extends to streetscape elements and furniture.
	MP3: Building Heights	The Dacorum towns should generally be constrained to four storeys or less, with the exception of the Hemel Hempstead town centre
	MP4: Density and Building Typology	The Dacorum towns should strive to create mixed use town centres creating high densities with good quality flats above shops. There are opportunities to increase densities on larger sites (over 0.35hectares) which are in close proximity to shops, services or transit stops.
	MP5: Topographical studies	Dacorum has several river valleys coursing through it, and topography has had a significant impact on the morphology of the towns, creating distinct street patterns and key views. Development within the towns should continue to accentuate views from the valley sides into the town centres.

	CRITERIA	GUIDELINE
CONTINUITY AND ENCLOSURE	CE1: Morphology	The town morphology should emphasise vehicular and pedestrian permeability within a clean street hierarchy (see circulation, demand and linkages). Residential footprints should not be too massive, facilitating permeability and future flexibility. Street design which establishes narrow 'blocks' which allow fronts onto access roads and force backs of houses onto primary or district distributors should be avoided
	CE2: Village Centre Morphology	Town centres should be highly permeable and the existing street morphology should accentuate the primacy of the High Street and the distributor routes that extend off from it. Residential access roads, particularly cul-de-sacs and dead-end roads, extending from the High Street, should be avoided.
	CE3: Building Lines and Pavements	Consistency in the building lines along each street should be emphasised. Generally, the town centre zone should have minimal setbacks, the inner zone should have, depending on the given street, minimal or medium setbacks, the semi-rural and peripheral zones should have medium to large setbacks. Residential buildings along primary or district distributors many have increased setbacks to proved distance from through traffic.
	CE4: Building Orientation	Building entries should typically face the street, both to create increased sense of security and added vitality to the public realm. New developments which result in houses backing onto primary or district distributor roads should be avoided. As described in the morphology guidelines, developments which result in fronts along access roads and backs along primary or district distributors should be avoided.
	CE5: Patterns of Open Space	Houses should have rear gardens that back onto other rear gardens as a means of maximising wildlife habitat, privacy and sunlight. New developments should consider the context when determining if front gardens are individual or communal (as individual front gardens are often critical to the character of an area).

	CRITERIA	GUIDELINE
MAKING CONNECTIONS	MC1: Land Use	Mixed use town centres should be encouraged and residential uses based around retail sheds should be explored. The local centres in Hemel Hempstead should be maintained where possible and corner shop retail axes could be explored outside the town centres.
	MC2: Circulation, Demand and Linkages	The street hierarchy should consider the High Street within the town centre as a local distributor which encourages pedestrian activity and discourages traffic using the town as a bypass to avoid crowded 'A' roads. The High Streets outside of the town centres should be considered primary distributors for residents to leave the town. District distributors (also referred to as a secondary route) should generally extend from the High Street and primary distributors. Residential access roads (also referred to as tertiary routes) should generally branch off from the district distributors and not the High Street. Footpaths represent important circulation paths in the towns, and cycling routes should be encouraged.
	MC3: Parking	On-street parking should typically be avoided for primary and district distributors and encouraged for local distributors (High Streets) and residential access roads when street widths permit it and it does not impinge on the rural character. Newer developments may consider communal on-site parking, particularly if located off of district distributors.
	MC4: Wayfinding Signage	Wayfinding signage should be applied consistently throughout the towns as a way of indicating places of interest, connections to open land and the presence of a clean street hierarchy.
QUALITY OF THE PUBLIC REALM	QPR1: Streetscape Elements	Streetscape elements should be used to reinforce the difference between the different urban design zones, the presence of a street hierarchy through traffic calming treatments and the distinctiveness of Conservation Areas.
	QPR2: Designated Open Land	Footpaths that connect to open land in the Green Belt should be protected and developed. Large scale new developments should provide connections to open land, and if particularly large, new designated open land.

	CRITERIA	GUIDELINE
LEGIBILITY	LE1: Vistas, Views, Gateways	Vistas into and from the Green Belt should be protected and a designated buffer along the Green Belt should be established to protect against a high-rise development. View corridors along the High Streets and the Grand Union Canal and toward key orientation points should be recognised and protected. Clear gateways into the town centres should be established and marked by gateway signage, key buildings and changes in streetscape treatments. Key viewpoints within the towns should be established and integrated into the design review process
	LE2: Edges, Paths, Nodes, Landmarks, Districts	Landmarks and districts should be clarified through co-ordinated streetscape treatment. Key nodes and gateways should be established

NB: Some of the recommendations require the input of agencies external to the Borough Council.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information regarding the Urban Design Assessment please contact:

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