

**MATURE SUBURBS RESIDENTIAL
DEVELOPMENT GUIDELINES**

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BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

Mature Suburbs

Residential Development Guidelines

- Interim Supplementary Planning Advice -

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Birmingham has witnessed considerable residential development over the last few years. Many successful, new developments have higher densities than those in the past. However, the development of windfall sites in many of Birmingham's mature suburbs is a recent trend that has given cause for concern. These suburbs are often desirable and attractive areas that are some of the City's most important assets. It is anticipated that pressure for new residential development at high densities in these suburbs will continue and this could, if inappropriate, erode the unique character that make these places so special.
- 1.2 There is a key relationship between environmental quality and levels of economic activity. The diversity of different residential environments and the maintenance of high quality areas in the suburbs are essential elements in ensuring a balanced portfolio of residential properties and areas across the city.
- 1.3 The purpose of this Interim Supplementary Planning Advice is to provide supplementary policy on new residential development in mature suburbs with high quality environments, whether in the form of infill or redevelopment. Following adoption of the UDP Alterations and in the light of experience in its operation consideration will be given to this document's formal inclusion as part of the Local Development Framework.
- 1.4 These guidelines set out clearly the City Council's expectations for developers and designers. They have been prepared in the context of National Planning Policy Guidance and Development Plan Policies.

2 Document Summary

- 2.1 The essential features of this guide are:
 - The environment strategy set out in both the adopted (1993) and Deposit Draft (2001) Birmingham Unitary Development Plan is based on two principles:-
 - (a) the need to protect and enhance what is good in the City's environment, and to improve what is less good;
 - (b) the need to recognise the key relationship between environmental quality and levels of economic activity.
 - Higher density residential schemes are most appropriately located in centres, at transport hubs and along major transport corridors.

- Whilst many mature suburbs do not merit designation as conservation areas, their high quality environments and characters should not be harmed by inappropriate development.
- Proposals should be informed by a detailed contextual appraisal to determine the character of an area. This appraisal should include consideration of built form, spatial composition, architectural style, enclosure, density and levels of vegetation. The appraisal should be incorporated in a design statement showing how the proposal fits into the character of the area.
- A series of detailed design criteria will be considered when appraising the design of proposals. These include plot size, building form, landscape and boundary treatment, plot access, parking provision and design style.
- Proposals should not harm the distinctive character of an area. Proposals that undermine and harm the positive characteristics of a mature suburb will be resisted.

3 Background

- 3.1 The recently revised Regional Planning Guidance for the West Midlands (RPG11 – June 2004) has set-down the housing requirement for Birmingham during the period 2001-2021. A minimum of 2,300 dwellings per year between 2001-2007 and 3,000 dwelling per year between 2008-2021 are required. Across the City a total of 8,965 dwellings were completed during the three year period 2001 – 2003, of which 4,004 (44.7%) were houses and 4,961 (55.3%) were flats. The high percentage of flats, reflects the recent urban renaissance in City Centre apartments, as well as decreasing household sizes. Over the same period in Sutton, an area containing many mature suburbs with high quality environments, 1,517 dwelling were completed, of which 1,103 (72.7%) were houses and 414 (27.3%) were flats. The City is currently performing well against the Regional Planning Guidance figures.
- 3.2 Housing proposals will come forward in many different formats. With the increasing demand for housing in the City there will be continuing pressure on high quality residential areas in the City, particularly Sutton Coldfield, Edgbaston, Harborne, Kings Norton, Hall Green and Erdington, whereby developers are buying individual or groups of properties and/or extensive rear gardens and proposing higher density apartment / housing schemes. Areas of concern associated with such forms of development have been found to be potentially damaging to the environment in numerous appeal decisions across the city over recent years.

4 Policy Approach

- 4.1 The following Planning Guidance and Policies form the context for this supplementary policy, which has citywide coverage.
- 4.2 Planning Policy Guidance Note 3 ‘Housing’ (PPG3 – March 2000), promotes the creation of more sustainable patterns of development, making more efficient use of land and giving priority to re-using previously-developed land within urban areas. PPG3 states that all new housing developments, of whatever scale, should not be viewed in isolation. The design and layout of proposals must be informed by the wider context. They must have regard not just to any immediate neighbouring buildings but the wider townscape and landscape characteristics of the surrounding area. Local Planning Authorities and developers should think imaginatively about design and layouts, which make more efficient use of land without compromising the quality of the environment.
- 4.3 A strategic objective set out in the Regional Planning Guidance for the West Midlands (RPG11 – June 2004) is to make the Major Urban Areas (MUAs) increasingly attractive places where people want to live. Policy CF3 (B) contains environmental safeguards in order to ensure that this objective is not undermined. These safeguards include compliance with locally adopted design guidelines consistent with PPG3.
- 4.4 The Birmingham Unitary Development Plan 1993 (UDP) and Deposit Draft 2001 (DDUDP), contain Environmental Policy 3.8 advising that the environment strategy is based on two principles:-
- (a) the need to protect and enhance what is good in the City’s environment, and to improve what is less good;
 - (b) the need to recognise the key relationship between environmental quality and levels of economic activity.
- 4.5 Also included in both the UDP and DDUDP are Environment Policies 3.10, 3.13, 3.14 and 3.19. These resist proposals that would have an adverse effect on the quality of the built environment and emphasises that improving the quality of the built environment is one of the most important of the UDP’s objectives. New developments will be expected to contribute, in terms of their design and landscaping, to the enhancement of the City’s environment and proposals for windfall housing developments on backland sites, which would detract from the overall environmental quality and character of a particular area will not be supported.
- 4.6 UDP Housing Policy 5.20 indicates that the City Council will take measures to maintain and protect the existing good quality residential environments, which are one of the City’s greatest assets. These can be eroded by continuing development and redevelopment and the introduction of ever-more units often at higher densities. Over time the process serves to diminish the particular quality of the residential environment itself. The revised Housing Policy 5.20 in the DDUDP requires proposals for new residential developments in good

quality environments to be carefully designed, so that they do not detract from the character of the surrounding area.

- 4.7 UDP Housing Policy 5.38 states that by and large, a variety of densities are appropriate throughout the City and on particular development sites. The main concern is to emphasise the quality of the development and its impact on its surroundings.
- 4.8 Particular references are made in paragraphs 9.9 and 9.10 of both the UDP and DDUDP, that the Sutton Coldfield Constituency possesses a range of high quality housing, which are a great asset to the City. Furthermore, little change is envisaged over the Plan period in much of the Constituency. Likewise, paragraph 16.7 acknowledges that Edgbaston is perceived as a 'leafy' residential area. There are many older residential areas, which contribute much to the desirable character and high quality environment that is found throughout much of the Constituency. Other references are made to other residential areas across the City and their good quality environments
- 4.9 The Deposit Draft Birmingham Unitary Development Plan 2001 is in an advanced stage of preparation, having been the subject of an inquiry and an Inspector's report, and carries significant weight.
- 4.10 'Places for Living' Supplementary Planning Guidance (2001) seeks desirable, sustainable and enduring residential areas and recognises that higher density forms are not appropriate everywhere. It is important in areas where lower density forms are a positive characteristic that harm is not caused by insensitive infill and redevelopment.
- 4.11 Correctly identifying the positive characteristics that contribute to the character of an area is crucial to ensure that they are not damaged by new development.

5 Character

- 5.1 Mature suburbs, in the context of this document, are high quality residential areas that generally date from the Victorian, Edwardian, and inter-war periods and were built to low or medium densities. There are large areas of mature suburbs in such areas as Sutton Coldfield, Edgbaston (Harborne, Moseley, Kings Norton, Hall Green and Erdington. However, there are other, smaller, pockets of such mature suburbs throughout the City and this document also relates to these areas.
- 5.2 Understandably, the individual characteristics of mature suburbs built in these periods vary, generating areas of different character. The principal element present, that makes these mature suburbs different to other suburbs within the City, is the significant degree of harmony of the positive characteristics, creating these high quality environments.

- 5.3 Character can be defined by a combination of a number of measurable factors. These include built form, spatial composition, architectural style, enclosure, density and levels of vegetation.
- 5.3.1 **Built Form** – This relates to the type of residential units (detached, semi-detached, terrace etc.), as well as their depth, width and height. Mature suburbs dating back to the Victorian and Edwardian periods are generally represented by large detached or semi-detached houses of at least two storeys, often with subordinate rear wings. Inter-war properties are smaller in size, ranging from detached, semi-detached to terraced properties. Outbuildings such as former coach houses and detached garages also contribute to the character, as well as areas of hard surfacing and provision of car parking.
- 5.3.2 **Spatial Composition** – The space between buildings is as important as the actual buildings in influencing the character of an area. Victorian and Edwardian properties are generally set in generous grounds, often with significant space between neighbouring dwellings and set back from the highway. Inter-war properties are often set tighter together on fairly narrow plots, with reasonable distances back from the highway and deep rear gardens. Corner plots on inter-war suburbs are regularly given more space to the side to enable a degree of openness at the junction.
- 5.3.3 **Architectural Style** – Arrangement of features such as porches, bay windows and chimneys as well as the texture colour and pattern of external materials contribute to the architectural style of a building or area. Victorian properties constructed of facing red brick and slate tiles may contain ground floor bay windows and large chimneystacks projecting from the end gables. Semi-detached inter-war dwellings constructed of a mix of facing red brick and render with clay tiles may contain double height bay windows and smaller, centrally located chimneys.
- 5.3.4 **Enclosure** – The layout, size and means of enclosure of gardens, as well as the width and location of any access points identify the enclosure of a curtilage or area. The degree of privacy to front gardens can influence the character of an area. Mature suburbs normally have deeper building lines and boundary treatments, such as brick/stone walls, fences, railings and hedgerows that achieve a reasonable level of privacy to the dwelling's frontage.
- 5.3.5 **Density** – The Deposit Draft UDP adopts a design-led approach to density, which seeks to make efficient use of land, taking into account factors relating to the quality of development and its impact on surroundings. Policy 5.20 requires that new residential development should not detract from the character of the surrounding area of existing good quality residential environments.
- 5.3.6 **Levels of Vegetation** – The presence of trees, hedgerows, lawns and other landscaped areas have a fundamental impact on the character of an area. Mature suburbs often have high levels of vegetation along boundaries, or within semi-private areas. Trees within private areas are often visible between or above buildings, or other streetscene vantage points, giving a well-

vegetated or woodland character to an area. Large, well-vegetated gardens can also give a sense of openness and tranquillity, offering a sense of retreat to occupiers of the dwellings in the area. Such large areas of green open space that are visible from the streetscene, and/or by occupiers of adjoining or nearby properties, can be of significant visual amenity and public value. Green spaces in and around housing and domestic gardens are classed as open space in PPG17 'Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation'. Where such areas of open space are of high quality and public value their character should be maintained and enhanced.

6 Design Criteria

- 6.1 Higher density residential schemes are most appropriately located, to achieve the Government's principal sustainability objectives, in centres, transport hubs or along major transport corridors. Locations should be within a reasonable walking distance from day-to-day facilities such as shops, as well as bus stops and train stations. Many mature suburbs are located outside of these areas and therefore would not represent a suitable location for higher density development. Unlike in mature suburbs, there is greater diversity to the character of centres, transport hubs and major transport corridors, offering greater opportunity and scope to develop higher density residential schemes.
- 6.2 Many mature suburbs do not warrant formal designation as conservation areas or the protection of individual dwellings. However, it is reasonable and desirable to ensure that their distinctive characters are not harmed when new development is undertaken.
- 6.3 The starting point for the creation of a new residential development in a mature suburb should be through a detailed context appraisal to determine the character of the area using the factors indicated in the previous section above. The appraisal should also include an assessment of the contribution the existing site gives to the character of the area. All application submissions must include a design statement including this context appraisal, which describes how the proposal will relate to the identified character of the site and area.
- 6.4 The proposal should be informed by the context appraisal undertaken and its findings respected in the planning process. Proposals in mature suburbs will be assessed against the following design criteria:
 - 6.4.1 **Plot Size** – Building plots should be of appropriate size (width, depth and shape) to reflect the typical form of plots in the area.
 - 6.4.2 **Building Form** – The frontage width, depth and height of the main building should be in keeping with those in the context. Secondary parts of the building should be subordinate to the scale and design of the main building. The amount of floorspace provided within the building should normally be similar to other buildings in the area.

- 6.4.3 **Building Siting** – New buildings should respect established building lines/set backs from highways. Separation distances between buildings should also respect the separation distances, which generally characterise the area.
- 6.4.4 **Landscape and Boundary Treatment** – Proposals should retain important landscape and boundary treatment features such as trees, hedgerows and walls. New landscaping and boundary treatments should reflect those present in the area. Large gardens that are of significant visual amenity and public value should not be lost.
- 6.4.5 **Plot Access** – Where possible, existing vehicular and pedestrian accesses should be retained. New accesses should reflect the position and width of those in the area as well as the material of the hard surfacing.
- 6.4.6 **Parking Provision** – Hard surfaced areas and garaging for the provision of parked vehicles should not differ from the size and location of those existing in the area. New parking areas should be discreet and sympathetic, avoid being located adjacent to neighbouring private gardens and not dominate the road frontage or result in the loss of mature boundaries. Off-street car parking requirements are a significant determinate in the amount of hard surfaced areas required within a site. PPG3 advises that developers should not provide more car parking than potential occupiers might want, nor provide off-street parking when there is no need. Lower levels of off-street parking maybe appropriate in sustainable locations, such as town centres, where services are readily accessible by walking, cycling or public transport.
- 6.4.7 **Design Styles** – Proposals are not required to copy or pastiche existing design styles in an area. Innovative and contemporary designs that respect their context are encouraged. References to existing architectural forms, fenestration, proportion of solid / void areas and external materials will be encouraged.
- 6.5 A new development within a mature suburb could easily appear unrelated to that area. The key is to ensure that a development does not harm the distinctive character of an area. Proposals that undermine and harm the positive characteristics of a mature suburb will be resisted.
- 6.6 In addition, a succession of developments with negative impacts, however small, on the character of a mature suburb, can have a cumulative impact resulting in the erosion of high quality environments across the City.