

Building for Life 12

Maidstone Edition 2018





Building for Life 12 (BfL12) is a design tool designed to help structure discussions about proposed new residential development between home builders, Urban Development Corporations, local authorities, communities and other stakeholders. BfL12 is England's leading process for creating well-designed homes and neighbourhoods – used by an increasing number of home builders, local authorities and community groups.

Endorsed by the government and cited in the National Planning Policy Framework, Building for Life 12 is managed by three partners - Design Council CAbE, Design for Homes and the Home Builders Federation.

BfL12 was created in 2012 to support the Government's commitment to:

- Building more homes
- Building better designed homes and neighbourhoods
- Creating a more creative and collaborative planning system
- Involving local communities in shaping development proposals

This version of the document was created to showcase examples of best practice in and around Maidstone, to help reinforce the Council's commitment to good design, and to using the BfL12 questions to help shape better development. In particular, streets that are places in their own right rather than just for cars, green and blue corridors that support ecology and design that imaginatively reflects the character and identity of the area should be a key focus for any new development. We aim to raise the bar in terms of sustainability, so new homes should be designed to the highest energy and adaptability standards. Finally, we hope that in using BfL12, all stakeholders can maximise the benefits that good design brings.



An introduction

Maidstone Council is committed to good design at every scale, from new places that create thriving communities to individual buildings that minimise their environmental impact. It is everyone's duty to ensure that what is built here is of the highest quality. This document is intended to help designers and decision-makers improve design, by highlighting common design issues and suggesting simple ways to embed quality.

To do this, a bespoke version of Building for Life 12 (BfL12) has been developed for use in the Borough. Planning applications involving residential development are expected to demonstrate how they address the quality design criteria within BfL12. It is therefore suggested that designers use the Maidstone BfL12 to help them develop their designs.

Applicants should, and the local authority's planning officers will use the Maidstone BfL12 to structure their discussions as they develop their proposals. Applicants should also demonstrate how they have used the Borough's BfL12 in their Design and Access Statements. Maidstone's officers and elected members will use BfL12 to help assess planning applications for design quality.

Maidstone Borough Council places particular emphasis on :-

1. Vernacular materials and architectural detailing either used in an authentic manner or in a modern idiom.
2. Landscaping being integral to design. For example, 'green corridors' which function as ecological corridors which are part of the 'spine' to layouts and which physically connect with corridors outside of the site.
3. Streets for all. Streets which are not dominated, in design terms, in order to cater for the car.
4. The application of sustainable design principles.
5. Features to promote bio-diversity being integral to the design of a scheme.

National background to Maidstone's own BfL12

Maidstone Council is committed to good design at every scale, from new places that create thriving communities to individual buildings that minimise their environmental impact. It is everyone's duty to ensure that what is built here is of the highest quality. This document is intended to help designers and decision-makers improve design, by highlighting common design issues and suggesting simple ways to embed quality.

To do this, a bespoke version of Building for Life 12 (BfL12) has been developed for use in the Borough. Planning applications involving residential development

are expected to demonstrate how they address the quality design criteria within BfL12. It is therefore suggested that designers use the Maidstone BfL12 to help them develop their designs.

Applicants should, and the local authority's planning officers will use the Maidstone BfL12 to structure their discussions as they develop their proposals. Applicants should also demonstrate how they have used the Borough's BfL12 in their Design and Access Statements. Maidstone's officers and elected members will use BfL12 to help assess planning applications for design quality.



12 easy-to-understand questions

Each question is followed by a series of additional questions that are intended as prompts to stimulate discussions and ensure that all aspects of a scheme have been well considered. We've also provided five recommendations for how you might respond with the aim of offering a range of responses.

Recommendations are designed to stimulate discussion with local communities, the project team, the local authority and other stakeholders to help you find the right solution locally. No one is required to meet all recommendations, instead they are prompts to guide you to better design solutions.

National policy and BfL12

By using the Maidstone BfL12 as a dialogue tool throughout the design process, consistency with the NPPF can be achieved; although national Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) is yet to be updated from the 2014 version aligned with the 2012 NPPF, the Borough's BfL12 is not inconsistent with its design guidance either.

They have been designed to stimulate discussion with local communities, the project team, the Borough Council and other stakeholders, to help home builders to find the right solution locally. No one is required to meet all recommendations, instead they are prompts to guide towards better design solutions.

Each of the twelve main questions is followed by others that are intended as prompts to stimulate discussion and ensure that all aspects of a scheme have been well-considered. This Maidstone version of BfL12 also provides recommendations for a range of possible responses.

The table at the end of this document illustrates the relationship between the twelve questions and the 2018 NPPF (and the soon-to-be-updated PPG). The Maidstone BfL12 is therefore an easy way to ensure that proposed developments are consistent with national policy- a more streamlined way of approaching housing design than working through all of the individual NPPF policy and PPG references.

Integrating into the neighbourhood



1 Connections

Does the scheme integrate into its surroundings by reinforcing existing connections and creating new ones, while also respecting existing buildings and land uses around the development site?



2 Facilities and services

Does the development provide (or is it close to) community facilities, such as shops, schools, workplaces, parks, play areas, pubs or cafes?



3 Public transport

Does the scheme have good access to public transport to help reduce car dependency?



4 Meeting local housing requirements

Does the development have a mix of housing types and tenures that suit local requirements?

Creating a place



5 Character

Does the scheme create a place with a locally inspired or otherwise distinctive character?



6 Working with the site and its context

Does the scheme take advantage of existing topography, landscape features (including water courses), wildlife habitats, existing buildings, site orientation and microclimates?



7 Creating well defined streets and spaces

Are buildings designed and positioned with landscaping to define and enhance streets and spaces and are buildings designed to turn street corners well?



8 Easy to find your way around

Is the scheme designed to make it easy to find your way around?

Street & home



9 Streets for all

Are streets designed in a way that encourage low vehicle speeds and allow them to function as social spaces?



10 Car parking

Is resident and visitor parking sufficient and well integrated so that it does not dominate the street?



11 Public and private spaces

Will public and private spaces be clearly defined and designed to be attractive, well managed and safe?



12 External storage and amenity space

Is there adequate external storage space for bins and recycling as well as vehicles and cycles?



Section 1:

Connecting to the neighbourhood



Q1: Connections

Does the scheme integrate into its surroundings by reinforcing existing connections and creating new ones, while also respecting existing buildings and land uses around the development site?



We recommend

Thinking about where connections can and should be made; and about how best the new development can integrate into the existing neighbourhood rather than creating an inward-looking cul-de-sac development.

Remembering that people who live within a new development and people who live nearby may want to walk through the development to get somewhere else, so carefully consider how a development can contribute towards creating a more walkable neighbourhood.

Thinking carefully before blocking or redirecting existing routes, particularly where these are well-used. Carefully consider connectivity around the edges of the development, bearing in mind that a network of private drives can frustrate and block pedestrian and cycle movement.

Creating a network of connections that are attractive, well-lit, direct, easy to navigate, overlooked and safe. Bear in mind that a pedestrian or cycleway through an open space may be attractive as a route during daylight hours, but less so early in the evening during winter.

Ensuring that all street, pedestrian and cycle-only routes pass in front of people's homes, rather than to the back of them.

Remembering that **connections are needed for natural systems too,** so green and blue corridors should be provided where possible to connect ecological systems across a site.

We recommend that you avoid

Seeing connectivity only in term of access to a development and not considering how the layout of a development could be designed to improve connectivity across the wider neighbourhood.

Not considering where future connections might need to be made - or could be provided - in the future. This could include links to footpath networks beyond the site as well as to existing streets.

Leaving space between the end of a route and the edge of a site that could later become a ransom strip, stopping developments next to each other from joining up.

Addressing green and blue corridors as if there were an add-on rather than integral to the layout. Retrofitting ecological corridors is difficult, so they should be included at the outset.

1a Where should vehicles come in and out of the development?

1b Should there be pedestrian and cycle only routes into and through the development? If so, where should they go?

1c Where should new streets be placed, could they be used to cross the development site and help create linkages across the scheme and into the existing neighbourhood and surrounding places?

1d How should the new development relate to existing development? What should happen at the edges of the development site?



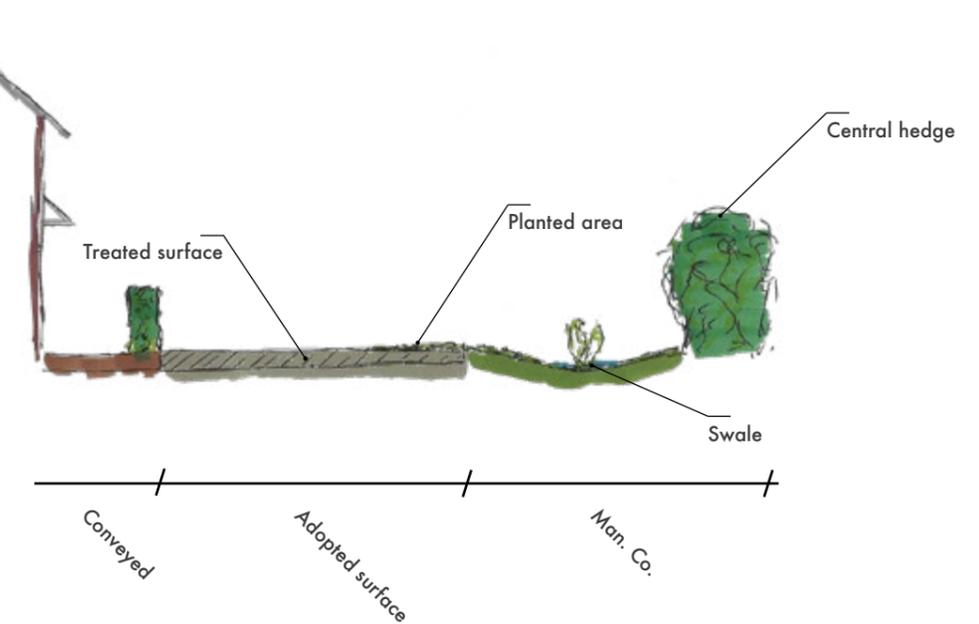
Pedestrian links: This short, well-lit and well-sighted pedestrian link allows people to walk and cycle into and out of the site. Keeping pedestrian and cycle-only routes well-overlooked encourages their use.



Desire lines: New routes should be aligned so that people can move as directly as possible. Here, the path takes the long route around the green, whereas the quickest and most direct route is partially blocked.

Connecting the edges

Private drives serving only a small number of units are often used at the edges of sites, as building streets to adoptable standards with buildings only on one site is expensive. Often, this means that they do not connect together, and create edges that are difficult to move along. A solution is to create an adoptable sub-base but to surface only part of it, with soft planting on the rest. This provides a narrow, low-speed lane that can be adopted and widened if needed in the future.





Q2: Facilities and services

Does the development provide (or is it close to) community facilities, such as shops, schools, workplaces, parks, play areas, pubs or cafes?



We recommend

Planning development so that everyday facilities and services are located within a short walk of people's homes. The layout of a development and the quality of connections it provides can make a significant impact on walking distances and people's travel choices.

Providing access to facilities through the provision of safe, convenient and direct paths or cycle routes. Consider whether there are any barriers to pedestrian/cycle access (for example, busy roads with a lack of crossing points) and how these barriers can be removed or lessened.

Locating new facilities (if provided) where the greatest number of existing and new residents can access them easily, recognising that this may be at the edge of a new development or on a through route; but consider whether existing facilities can be enhanced before proposing new ones.

Remembering that new schools can provide high levels of activity, so locating these near to new shops and services can help improve viability as well as encouraging linked trips, reducing the need to travel.

Where new local centres are provided, design these as vibrant places with smaller shops combined with residential accommodation above (rather than a single storey, single use supermarket building). Work to integrate these facilities into the fabric of the wider development to avoid creating an isolated retail park type environment dominated by car parking and highways infrastructure.

Creating new places within a development where people can meet each other such as public spaces, community buildings, cafes and restaurants. Aim to get these delivered as early as possible. Think carefully about how spaces could be used and design them with flexibility in mind, considering where more active spaces should be located so as to avoid creating potential conflict between users and adjacent residents.

We recommend that you avoid

Locating play areas directly in front of people's homes where they may become a source of tension due to potential for noise and nuisance.

Carefully consider the distance between play equipment and homes in addition to the type of play equipment selected and the target age group.

Creating the potential for future conflict if residential uses and commercial premises are not combined thoughtfully. Noise and odours need to be considered carefully, as do servicing requirements and the hours of operation.

2a Are there enough facilities and services in the local area to support the development? If not, what is needed?

2c Are these new facilities located in the right place? If not, where should they go?

Where new facilities are proposed:

2b Are these facilities what the area needs?

2d Does the layout encourage walking, cycling or using public transport to reach them?



A mix of uses: New homes close to shops, a pub, and other services. Placing commercial uses near to where people live increases viability and helps reduce car journeys.



Play areas and green spaces: This play area is integrated into the green space without the need for fencing. It is well-overlooked without being too close to people's homes.



Q3: Public transport

Does the scheme have good access to public transport to help reduce car dependency?

We recommend

Maximising the number of homes on sites that are close to good, high frequency public transport routes, but ensure that this does not compromise the wider design qualities of the scheme and its relationship with its surroundings. 'Hail and ride' schemes agreed with public transport providers can help reduce the distance people need to walk between their home and public transport.

Carefully considering the layout and orientation of routes to provide as many people as possible with the quickest, safest, attractive and most convenient possible routes between homes and public transport.

Considering how the layout of the development can maximise the number of homes within a short walk from their nearest bus, tram or train stop where new public transport routes are planned to pass through the development. Locate public transport stops in well used places, ensuring that they are accessible for all, well overlooked and lit.

Considering how the development can contribute towards encouraging more sustainable travel choices, for example by establishing a residents car club, providing electric car charging points, creating live/work units or homes that include space for a home office.

Exploring opportunities to reduce car miles through supporting new or existing park and ride schemes or supporting the concept of transit orientated developments (where higher density and/or mixed use development is centred on train or tram stations).

We recommend that you avoid

Thinking about development sites in isolation from their surroundings, so that existing public transport services do not benefit from new passengers.

Where encouraging through-traffic might be problematic, bus-only routes (or bus plugs) can be used to connect a new development to an existing development and create a more viable bus service without creating new routes cars.

Relying on bus services to come into new developments when often the existing routes to the edges of developments are the most convenient. This means that existing bus routes need to be easy to get to.

3a What can the development do to encourage more people (both existing and new residents) to use public transport more often?

3b Where should new public transport stops be located?



Access to public transport: A bus stop sitting right outside the door of this new development, with good footpath connections linking to it for residents.



Shared footway / cycleway: Making surfaces wide enough so that both cyclists and pedestrians can be a good way to get less confident cyclists who are intimidated by main roads out on their bikes.



Q4: Meeting local housing requirements

Does the development have a mix of housing types and tenures that suit local requirements?



We recommend

Demonstrating how the scheme's housing mix is justified with regard to planning policy, the local context and viability.

Aiming for a housing mix that will create a broad-based community.

Considering how to incorporate a range of property sizes and types, avoiding creating too many larger or too many smaller homes from being grouped together.

Providing starter homes and homes for the elderly or downsizing households. People who are retired can help enliven a place during the working day. Providing for downsizing households can also help to rebalance the housing market and may help reduce the need for affordable housing contributions over time.

Designing homes and streets to be tenure-blind, so that it is not easy to differentiate between homes that are private and those that are shared ownership or rented.

Designing to the highest possible standards in terms of sustainability and adaptability, so that future residents have a home that is affordable to run and that can be adapted as their needs change over time.

We recommend that you avoid

Developments that create homes for one market segment unless the development is very small.

Using exterior features that enable people to easily identify market sale from rented / shared ownership homes, such as the treatment of garages or entrances.

Reducing the level of parking provision for rented / shared ownership homes. Rows of unbroken frontage parking (see bottom image, right) often highlight affordable housing within a development and reduce the quality of the street.

Designing only to the minimum standards for sustainability and adaptability, unless viability is truly an issue and can be demonstrated as such.

4a What types of homes, tenure and price range are needed in the area (for example, starter homes, family homes or homes for those downsizing)?

4b Is there a need for different types of home ownership (such as part buy and part rent) or rented properties to help people on lower incomes?

4c Are the different types and tenures spatially integrated to create a cohesive community?



Apartments that fit in: This block of apartments still retains a sense of scale appropriate for the location, and manages to sit comfortably next to smaller houses.



A mix of tenures: Here, affordable housing has been constructed to the same standards and appearance as market housing. Only the numbered parking bays suggest a different tenure. Small numbered plates marking the parking space would have been a more subtle approach.



Section 2:
Creating a place



Q5: Character

Does the scheme create a place with a locally inspired or otherwise distinctive character?

We recommend

Identifying whether there are any architectural, landscape or other features, such as special materials that give a place a distinctive sense of character as a starting point for design. It may be possible to adapt elevations of standard house types to complement local character. Distinctiveness can also be delivered through new designs that respond to local characteristics in a contemporary way.

Exploring what could be done to start to give a place a locally inspired identity if an area lacks a distinctive character or where there is no overarching character. The use of Kent ragstone for buildings and walls is a key characteristic of the area, and there is great scope for using vernacular details such as this in modern ways to reinforce local character.

Landscaping treatments are often fundamental to character, especially boundary treatments. For Maidstone and surrounding areas, post and rail fencing in split-logs or 'riven' is commonplace, as are picket fences and hedges.

Introducing building styles, details and public realm features that can be readily familiar to someone visiting the development for the first time. Where an area has a strong and positive local identity, consider using this as a cue to reinforce the place's overall character.

Varying the density, built form and appearance or style of development to help create areas with different character within larger developments. Using a range of features⁹ will help to create town and cityscape elements that can give a place a sense of identity and will help people find their way around. Subtle detailing can help reinforce the character of areas and in doing so, provide a level of richness and delight.

Working with the local planning and highway authority to investigate whether local or otherwise different materials can be used in place of standard highways surface materials and traffic furniture. Be creative and adventurous by exploring the potential to innovate - develop new ideas and build with new materials.

We recommend that you avoid

Using the lack of local character as a justification for further nondescript or placeless development. Ignoring local traditions or character without robust justification.

Using non-native planting for landscape treatments, especially for boundaries and street trees. The landscape character of the Kent Downs AONB is an especially relevant and useful source of inspiration in this area.

Timber knee rail or other bland and cheap boundary treatments rather than the types common in the area. Post-and-rail fencing made of locally sourced timber, picket fences and walls in brick or stone reference the character of the area. Native hedge species can be used to soften the street and improve biodiversity.

Using materials that do not support the character and identity of the area, such as bricks and boarding in the wrong colours or roofing materials that are out of character.

5a How can the development be designed to have a local or distinctive identity?

5b Are there any distinctive characteristics within the area, such as building shapes, styles, colours and materials or the character of streets and spaces that the development should draw inspiration from?



Locally inspired materials: This design uses materials that reflect the locality, such as riven post-and-rail fencing, tile-hanging, and a muted colour palette. Other details such as the consistent boundary treatments, and the swale to within the public realm help add character.



Buildings and spaces together: A great deal of the character can be generated from how buildings, streets and open spaces are combined. Using feature buildings at key locations along with a strong landscape structure can help new developments look and feel mature and attractive.



Q6: Working with the site and its context

Does the scheme take advantage of existing topography, landscape features (including water courses), trees and plants, wildlife habitats, existing buildings, site orientation and microclimate?



We recommend

Being a considerate neighbour. Have regard to the height, layout, building line and form of existing development at the boundaries of the development site. Frame views of existing landmarks and create new ones by exploiting features such as existing mature trees to create memorable spaces. Orientate homes so that as many residents as possible can see these features from within their homes. Carefully consider views into the development and how best these can be designed.

Assessing the potential of any older buildings or structures for conversion. Retained buildings can become instant focal points within a development. Where possible, avoid transporting building waste and spoil off site by exploring opportunities to recycling building materials within the development.

Working with contours of the land rather than against them, exploring how built form and detailed housing design can creatively respond to the topographical character; thinking carefully about the roofscape. Explore how a holistic approach can be taken to the design of sustainable urban drainage by exploiting the topography and geology.

Exploring opportunities to protect, enhance and create wildlife habitats. Be creative in landscape design by creating wildflower meadows rather than closely mown grassland and, where provided, creating rich habitats within balancing lagoons, rainwater gardens, rills and swales.

Considering the potential to benefit from solar gain through building orientation and design where this can be achieved without compromising good urban design or creating issues associated with over heating¹³. Finally have regard to any local micro-climate and its impact.

We recommend that you avoid

Leaving an assessment of whether there are any views into and from the site that merit a design response until late in the design process. Maidstone's relationship with the Kent Downs AONB is integral to the character and identity of the places in the area. Views out onto the Downs should be incorporated into new development rather than blocked by buildings.

Transporting uncontaminated spoil away from the site that could be used for landscaping or adding level changes where appropriate.

Simply turfing over retained spoil without a good layer of topsoil. Existing soil often contains important micro-organisms that can aid biodiversity.

Retaining existing landscape features without thinking about whether they are viable or contribute to the quality of the new development.

Not carefully considering opportunities for rainwater attenuation both on plot and off. Swales and ditches are commonplace in this part of the country and should be integrated into the development.

Not carefully thinking about what balancing lagoons will look like and how people could enjoy them as attractive features within an open space network. Careful thought in the design process can eliminate the need for fenced off lagoons that are both unsightly and unwelcoming.

6a Are there any views into or from the site that need to be carefully considered?

6b Are there any existing trees, hedgerows or other features, such as streams that need to be carefully designed into the development?

6c Should the development keep any existing building(s) on the site? If so, how could they be used?



Retaining existing features: Here, existing trees have been integrated into the design. Here, the landscape is as important as the buildings in making this development an attractive place to be.



Managing water: The verges in the development double as part of the water management system. Plants absorb run-off, with excess water travelling along the swale to storage areas in the main square. This means that the technical requirement to manage surface water is performed in a way that provides an attractive amenity for residents. It also provides opportunities to improve biodiversity.



Q7: Creating well defined streets and spaces

Are buildings designed and positioned with landscaping to define and enhance streets and spaces and are buildings designed to turn street corners well?

We recommend

Creating streets that are principally defined by the position of buildings rather than the route of the carriageway. Variations in the width of the street can add interest and allow for parking and landscape.

Designing building that turn corners well, so that both elevations seen from the street have windows to them, rather than offering blank walls to the street. Consider using windows that wrap around corners to maximise surveillance and bring generous amounts of natural light into people's homes.

Using a pattern of street types to create a hierarchy, and especially considering their enclosure, keeping to the well proportioned height to width ratios relative to the type of street.

Designing streets so that the hierarchy reinforces their role in organising movement on site, with more important streets for moving around being easily identifiable to visitors.

Varying the materials applied to buildings so that they support the hierarchy of streets, with more expensive materials use on the primary streets and most cost-conscious treatments applied to more minor streets.

Respecting basic urban design principles when designing layouts. For example, forming strong perimeter blocks, providing active frontages, and avoiding routes that are poorly overlooked.

Orientating front doors to face the street rather than being tucked around the back or sides of buildings.

We recommend that you avoid

Streets that lack successful spatial enclosure by exceeding recommended height to width ratios. Where a wide street is needed, tree planting can help add enclosure.

Over reliance on front-of-plot parking that tends to create over wide streets dominated by parked cars and driveways unless there is sufficient space to use strong and extensive planting to compensate the lack of built form enclosure.

Homes that back on to the street or offer a blank elevation to the street. This includes plots where the garden presents its edge to the street. For corners, the new home should address the highest order street with its front and put any return frontage onto the lower order street.

Locating garages and /or driveways (or service areas and substations) on street corners or other prominent locations, such as the 'end point' of a view up or down a street.

Open frontages to plots, so that the private space is not clearly defined from the public streets and footpaths. Instead, boundaries should be vertically delineated.

7a Are buildings and landscaping schemes used to create enclosed streets and spaces?

7b Do buildings turn corners well?

7c Do all fronts of buildings, including front doors and habitable rooms, face the street?



Defining the street: A simple building line, with doors that open to the front, a boundary treatment delineating the extent of the plot, and lots of windows onto the street help to support the usability and attractiveness of this street.



Well-overlooked public spaces: Public spaces that are well-overlooked are more likely to be used and less likely to attract antisocial behaviour. Here, the village green is addressed by buildings on all sides, helping to make the space attractive, welcoming and safe.



Q8: Easy to find your way around

Is the development designed to make it easy to find your way around?

We recommend

Making it easy for people to create a mental map of the place by incorporating features that people will notice and remember.

Create a network of well defined streets and spaces with clear routes, local landmarks and marker features. For larger developments it may be necessary to create distinct character areas. Marker features, such as corner buildings and public spaces combined with smaller scale details such as colour, variety and materials will further enhance legibility.

Providing views through to existing or new landmarks and local destinations, such as parks, woodlands or tall structures help people understand where they are in relation to other places and find their way around.

Making it easy for all people to get around including those with visual or mobility impairments.

Identifying and considering important viewpoints within a development, such as views towards the end of a street. Anticipate other, more subtle viewpoints, for example a turn or curve in the street and how best these can be best addressed.

Creating a logical hierarchy of streets. A tree lined avenue through a development can be an easy and effective way to help people find their way around.

We recommend that you avoid

Creating a concept plan for a scheme that does not include careful consideration as to how people will create a mental map of the place. Site planning should ensure that special and memorable structures and planting support wayfinding.

Dead-ends, or routes that appear to lead to somewhere important for the wider public but then stop. Allowing views along a street help to avoid this.

Blocking views of landscape and ridge lines often visible within the area, so that a connection to the wider landscape setting is lost.

8a Will the development be easy to find your way around? If not, what could be done to make it easier to find your way around?

8b Are there any obvious landmarks?

8c Are the routes between places clear and direct?



Visual connectivity: Make sure that people can see where routes lead to. Here, a strong visual connection between the main street at the front of the site and the park at the back helps people find the things they want.



Direct routes: Simple, direct streets and paths are easier to navigate. Making connections as direct as possible, avoiding unnecessary deflections and curves, is a key component of easy to navigate places.



Section 3:
Street and home



Q9: Streets for all

Are streets designed in a way that encourage low vehicle speeds and allow them to function as social spaces?

We recommend

Creating streets for people where vehicle speeds are designed not to exceed 20 mph. Work with the Highways Authority to create developments where buildings and detailed street design is used to tame vehicle speeds. Sharp or blind corners force drivers to slow when driving around them while buildings that are closer together also make drivers proceed more cautiously. 20mph zones are becoming increasingly popular with local communities and are a cost effective way of changing driver behaviour in residential areas.

Thinking about how streets can be designed as social and play spaces, where the pedestrians and cyclists come first, rather than simply as routes for cars and vehicles to pass through.

Using the best quality hard landscaping scheme that is viable without cluttering the streets and public spaces.

Designing homes that offer good natural surveillance opportunities; carefully considering the impact of internal arrangement on the safety and vitality of the street. Consider maximising the amount of glazing to ground floor, street facing rooms to enhance surveillance opportunities creating a stronger relationship between the home and the street.

Creating homes that offer something to the street, thinking carefully about detail, craftsmanship and build quality. Afford particular attention to the space between the pavement and front doors. A thoughtful and well designed entrance area and front door scheme will enhance the kerb appeal of homes whilst also contributing towards creating a visually interesting street. Carefully consider changes in level, the interface between different materials, quality finishing and the discreet placement of utility boxes.

We recommend that you avoid

20mph speed limits enforced with excessive signage or expensive compliance systems or features.

Designing a scheme that allows drivers to cross pedestrian footpaths at speed to access their driveways. Consider how hard and soft landscaping can be used to make drivers approach their street and home more cautiously and responsibly.

Minimise steps and level changes to make them as easy as possible for pushchairs and wheelchairs.

A pavement that has lots of variation in levels and dropped kerbs to enable cars to cross it can encourage unofficial parking up on the kerb and may make movement less easy for those pushing a pushchair, in a wheelchair or walking with a stick or walking frame.

9a Are streets pedestrian friendly and are they designed to encourage cars to drive slower and more carefully?

9b Are streets designed in a way that they can be used as social spaces, such as places for children to play safely or for neighbours to converse?



Shared surface: In places with very low vehicle movements (less than 100 per day) it may be appropriate to create a shared surface like this one.



Streets for people: Minimal street clutter, lots of overlooking and a surface material that encourages low vehicle speeds help make this street a place in its own right.



Q10: Car parking

Is resident and visitor parking sufficient and well integrated so that it does not dominate the street?

We recommend

Anticipating car parking demand taking into account the location, availability and frequency of public transport together with local car ownership trends. Provide sufficient parking space for visitors.

Designing streets to accommodate on street parking but allow for plenty of trees and planting to balance the visual impact of parked cars and reinforce the spatial enclosure of the street. On street parking has the potential to be both space efficient and can also help to create a vibrant street, where neighbours have more opportunity to see and meet other people.

Prevent anti-social parking. Very regular and formal parking treatments have the potential to reduce anti-social parking. People are less prone to parking in places where they should not be parking, where street design clearly defines other uses, such as pavements or landscape features.

Making sure people can see their car from their home or can park it somewhere they know it will be safe. Where possible avoid rear parking courts.

Using a range of parking solutions appropriate to the context and the types of housing proposed. Where parking is positioned to the front of the property, ensure that at least an equal amount of the frontage is allocated to an enclosed, landscaped front garden as it is for parking to reduce vehicle domination. Where rows of narrow terraces are proposed, consider positioning parking within the street scene, for example a central reservation of herringbone parking. For higher density schemes, underground parking with a landscaped deck above can work well.

We recommend that you avoid

Relying on a single parking treatment. A combination of car parking treatments nearly always creates more capacity, visual interest and a more successful place.

Large rear parking courts. When parking courts are less private, they offer greater opportunity for thieves, vandals and those who should not be parking there.

Parking that is not well overlooked or near to the property it serves. Parking that is isolated will be poorly used and will lead to nuisance parking elsewhere.

Layouts that separate homes and facilities from the car, unless the scheme incorporates secure underground car parking.

Using white lining to mark out and number spaces. These are not only costly, but unsightly. It can be cheaper and more aesthetically pleasing to use small metal plates to number spaces, and a few well placed block markers to define spaces.

Not providing a clear and direct route between front doors and on-street parking or not balancing the amount of parking in front of plots with soft relief.

10a Is there enough parking for residents and visitors?

10b Is parking positioned close to people's homes?

10c Are any parking courtyards small in size (generally no more than five properties should use a parking courtyard) and are they well overlooked by neighbouring properties?

10d Are garages well positioned so that they do not dominate the street scene?



On-street parking: Allowing for on-street parking close to people's homes is a good way to ensure cars do not block pavements or clog up the carriageway.



Parking squares, not courts: Should there be a need for parking within the block, then forming a proper public space with active frontages and planting is preferable to a parking courtyard.



Q11: Public & private space

Will public and private spaces be clearly defined and designed to have appropriate access and be able to be well managed and safe in use?

We recommend

Clearly defining private and public spaces with clear vertical markers, such as railings, walling or robust planting. Where there is a modest building set back (less than 1m), a simple change in surface materials may suffice. Select species that will form a strong and effective boundary, such as hedge forming shrubs rather than low growing specimens or exotic or ornamental plants. Ensure sufficient budget provision is allocated to ensure a high quality boundary scheme is delivered.

Creating spaces that are well overlooked by neighbouring properties. Check that there is plenty of opportunity for residents to see streets and spaces from within their homes. Provide opportunities for direct and oblique views up and down the street, considering the use of bay, oriel and corner windows where appropriate. Designing balconies can further increase opportunities for natural surveillance.

Thinking about what types of spaces are created and where they should be located.

Consider how spaces can be designed to be multifunctional, serving as wide an age group as possible and how they could contribute towards enhancing biodiversity.

Think about where people might want to walk and what routes they might want to take and plan paths accordingly providing lighting if required. Consider the sun path and shadowing throughout the day and which areas will be in light rather than shade. Areas more likely to benefit from sunshine are often the most popular places for people to gather.

Exploring whether local communities would wish to see new facilities created or existing ones upgraded. Think how play can be approached in a holistic manner, for example by distributing play equipment or playable spaces and features across an entire open space.

Providing a management and maintenance plan to include a sustainable way to fund public or shared communal open spaces.

We recommend that you avoid

Informal or left over grassed areas that offer no public or private use or value and do little or nothing to support biodiversity.

Avoid creating small fenced play areas set within a larger area of open space where the main expense is the cost of fencing.

Landscaping that is cheap, of poor quality, poorly located and inappropriate for its location. Low growing shrubs rarely survive well in places where people are likely to accidentally walk over them (such as besides parking bays).

Narrow, segregated service strips at the side of carriageways that have the appearance of a very narrow footway.

11a What types of open space should be provided within this development?

11c How will they be looked after?

11b Is there a need for play facilities for children and teenagers? If so, is this the right place or should the developer contribute towards an existing facility in the area that could be made better?



Defining the plot: A simple and consistent boundary treatment helps to mark out what is public and what is private, creating defensible space in front of people's homes.



Accommodating services: Flat-laid blocks have been used to delineate the service strip at the edge of the carriageway. This creates the false impression of a footpath and should be avoided.



Q12: External storage and amenity space

Is there adequate external storage space for bins and recycling, as well as vehicles and cycles?

We recommend

Providing convenient, dedicated bin and recycling storage where bins and crates can be stored out of sight. Check with the local authority to determine exactly what space is required and minimise the distance between storage areas and collection points. Where terraced housing is proposed, consider providing integral stores to the front of the property (such as within an enclosed section of a recessed porch) or by providing secure 'twittens' between properties that provide direct access to the rear of properties.

Designing garages and parking spaces that are large enough to fit a modern family sized car and allow the driver to get out of the car easily. Where local authorities have requirements for garage sizes, parking spaces and circulation space design these into your scheme from the outset. If garages do not meet local requirements, do not count these as a parking space.

Considering whether garages should be counted as a parking space. If garages are to be counted as a parking space, ensure that sufficient alternative storage space is provided for items commonly stored in garages. Consider extending the length of the garage to accommodate storage needs or allowing occupants to use the roof space for extra storage.

Anticipating the realistic external storage requirements of individual households. Residents will usually need a secure place to store cycles and garden equipment. A storage room could be designed to the rear of the property (either attached or detached from the home), reviving the idea of a traditional outhouse. More creative solutions may be needed to satisfy the cycle storage requirements of higher density apartment accommodation.

Thinking carefully about the size and shape of outside amenity space. It is a good idea to ensure that rear gardens are at least equal to the ground floor footprint of the dwelling. Triangular shaped gardens rarely offer a practical, usable space. Allow residents the opportunity to access their garden without having to walk through their home.

We recommend that you avoid

Bin and recycling stores that detract from the quality of the street scene.

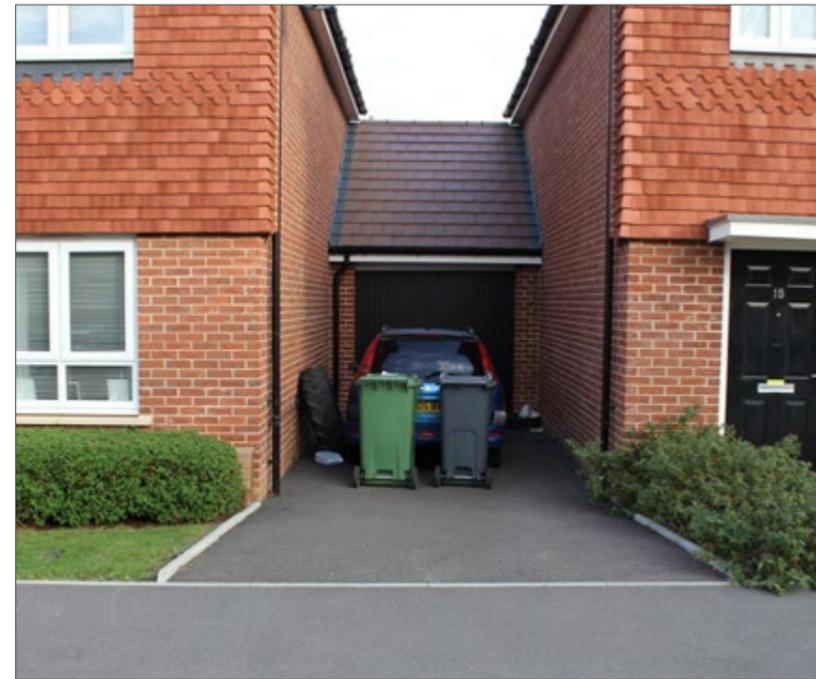
Locating bin and recycling stores in places that are inconvenient for residents, or they might find it easier to leave their bin and containers on the street.

Designing garages that are impractical or uncomfortable to use.

Cycle storage that is not secure or is difficult to access.

12a Is storage for bins and recycling items fully integrated, so that these items are less likely to be left on the street?

12b Is access to cycle and other vehicle storage convenient and secure?



A lack of storage: Here, the garage is too small to store the car, and the passage too narrow for the bins to be kept out of sight.



Keep an eye on drag distances: For private drives such as this one, bin collection points should be provided as often refuse collectors will not collect bins from properties along drives like this.



Using Building For Life 12 in urban locations

Supplementary design prompts were introduced into BfL12 in November 2014 in response to feedback from users about the need to better address design issues in more urban locations. This supplement deals with issues found where apartment blocks of three or more storeys create new developments with few, if any, new streets and where key design issues are how blocks respond to their locality, existing streets and movement.

Six of the twelve questions now have an alternative prompt to suit urban situations, which is especially relevant to the Maidstone context. Whilst the ethos of each question remains the same the emphasis and considerations reflect better the challenges and considerations associated with more urban locations and higher density developments. We recommend that design teams agree with the local authority which version of the questions are most appropriate to any proposed development.

Connections and scale

Does the scheme respond to the scale of its surroundings, respect existing view corridors (or create new ones), and reinforce existing connections and make new ones where feasible?

Design rationale: To emphasise visual connectivity whilst ensuring that where possible, the opportunity is taken to make physical connects that are going to be well-used and of benefit to residents and the wider community.

Easy to find your way in and around

Is the scheme designed to make it easy to understand the links between where people live and how you access the building, as well as how you move through it?

Design rationale: To emphasise the importance of creating a well defined entrance(s) to a development. Is it easy to find the front door?

Active Streets

Does the development engage with the street so passers-by will understand the movement between the building and the street, and is there an obvious visual link between inside and outside?

Design rationale: To emphasise the importance of creating active edges to a development at street level, carefully consider how the building relates to the street, how vehicle and servicing is designed and to avoid dead elevations.

Cycle and car parking

Will the development be likely to support and encourage cycling by providing cycle storage which people can use with confidence? Where parking is provided, is this easy to use? Are accesses to car parking designed not to impact on those not in cars? Are entrances to car parks over-engineered, visually obtrusive or obstructive to pedestrians and cyclists?

Design rationale: To emphasise the modal emphasis on bikes in more urban development where people are more likely to live close enough to work and leisure to cycle. Seeks to also promote well-designed entrances to parking areas whether at grade or underground.

Shared spaces

Is the purpose and use of shared space clear and is it designed to be safe and easily managed? Where semi-private or private spaces are created, are these clearly demarcated from the public realm?

Design rationale: To emphasise the importance of designing such spaces to be functional, attractive and well used.

Private amenity and storage

Are outdoor spaces, such as terraces and balconies, large enough for two or more people to sit? Is there opportunity for personalisation of these spaces? Is waste storage well integrated into the design of the development so residents and service vehicles can access it easily whilst not having an adverse impact on amenity for residents.

Design rationale: To focus on practical balcony sizes and well designed communal waste facilities that are well resolved in relation to building entrances and screened from publicly accessible routes.



Active streets: Retail centres such as Fremlin walk maximise the activity along their edges, making the spaces between buildings vibrant and attractive.



A mix of uses: Retail and residential uses mix well in town centres. Week Street in Maidstone town centre is a good example of this.



Why and how to use Building for Life 12

An increasing number of home builders are using BfL12 as a way of working to help speed up the planning process and improve the quality of the places they build. Ten years in the making, piloted on live planning applications and written to fit alongside both the National Planning Policy Framework and National Planning Practice Guidance, BfL12 has become the home building industry's preferred way of creating well-designed new homes and communities.

BfL12 is designed to be used as a design dialogue tool, a basis for discussion with 12 simple, easy to understand questions around which ideas can be shared and explored. BfL is ideal for facilitating local community participation in the place making process. It is also ideal for Neighbourhood Plans and Local Plans. BfL12 can be used to support planning applications and planning applications - but only where it has been used as a basis for discussion throughout the pre-application process.

Since 2012, BfL12 has been widely adopted across the home building industry, by Urban Development Corporations and an ever-increasing amount of local authorities. Its success has secured support from government as a way of not only building more homes, but better places to live.

A key benefit of BfL12 is that it can help local planning authorities consider the quality of both proposed and completed developments. The jargon free language of BfL12 will help planning officers to better communicate design considerations to Elected Members. BfL12 is also useful for creating site-specific briefs, structuring Design Codes and local design policies.

BfL12 is a way of working that helps guide development proposals towards better design. Developments that are based on these principles will help developers demonstrate to local planning authorities that their proposals are well considered and responsive to

considerations such as local characteristics specific to a given site.

Where BfL12 is used in this way and particularly where both the developer and local planning authority choose to use it as a basis for discussion, the planning process is often faster with a greater focus on design refinement rather than design fundamentals during the pre-application stage of a development.

BfL12 is therefore a mechanism through which local planning authorities can promote good design practice within their administrative boundaries and against which developers can set benchmarks for their businesses. BfL12 is the only tool that both the house building industry, government and an increasing amount of local planning authorities actively support. As such, BfL12 offers a routemap to consensus on what to focus on when discussing, designing and considering proposed new developments.

Today BfL12 is rapidly growing in both its popularity and its use:

- BfL12 is regularly referenced by government, Ministers and Members of Parliament as a constructive way of supporting house building rates without neglecting good design.
- Management consultancies evaluate whether house builders produce sustainable development using the BfL12 principles. For example, NextGeneration ranks major house builders by their commitment to it. (Source: NextGeneration).
- Building for Life 12 Wales is endorsed by Welsh Government and the Design Commission for Wales (DCFW). BfL12 is available in Welsh and English and complements the requirements of Planning Policy Wales and Technical Advice Note 12: Design. Training and support is available to Welsh authorities and communities from DCFW.

Securing Built for Life™ Accreditation

Building for Life 12 is about creating better places by promoting basic principles of urban design. Part of Building for Life is about recognising good practice and enabling developers that perform well against the 12 questions to demonstrate their commitment to good design to prospective home buyers. Any new development that secures at least nine 'green' indicators against the twelve questions are eligible to apply for a Built for Life™ quality mark.

Why nine out of twelve?

At times there are circumstances beyond the control of a developer that will mean it is not possible to secure a full complement of twelve 'green' indicators. These will normally only be justified in the first section of Building for Life 12, i.e. 'Integrating into the neighbourhood' (please see the 'Assessing what is appropriate' pages for more information). Developments that secure all twelve 'green' indicators are eligible quality mark is simple. To be considered for a quality mark a development must have secured planning permission.

The next stage is to upload details of the development onto www.builtforlifehomes.org. The scheme will then be subject to a 'light touch' review. If the development will have a strong likelihood of achieving a quality mark, the applicant will be invited to attend a Built for Life™ panel presentation where the scheme will be considered in more depth.

Previous versions of Building for Life (until 2010) relied on Accredited Assessors to provide definitive assessments of proposed developments, however this process has now changed. BfL12 places an emphasis on design focused discussions. At the start of the planning process, all those involved including local communities and other stakeholders are encouraged to contribute towards a discussion about what a place should become and what it needs to do. Particular stakeholders might have specific concerns or interests that can be captured in one or more of BfL12's questions.

In previous versions of Building for Life it was not uncommon for a developer to prepare an application,

engage in pre-application discussions with the local planning authority – within which no reference would be made to Building for Life. Yet once the application was formally submitted, the planning authority consulted an Accredited Assessor. Inevitably, where a scheme had not been designed with the Building for Life principles in mind they often failed to achieve them. This process often caused frustration and delays for both developers and local planning authorities.

The emphasis has therefore shifted away from formal assessments to using BfL12 primarily as a discussion tool. This way, those involved in an application can discuss each of the 12 questions in turn and agree what needs to be done to achieve 'greens' and in some cases, under what circumstances one or more 'ambers' may be justified.

Through this process, it is possible to identify areas of potential conflict or disagreement early. For instance, a draft set of proposals might be considered by the developer to achieve a 'green' against a particular question. However the local planning authority might consider the proposals to merit an 'amber' instead. At this point, a discussion should take place. The developer should demonstrate why they consider a 'green' to be merited, likewise the local planning authority should offer their perspective.

Where this approach is adopted, it is not uncommon for a consensus to be reached and in turn a solution found. If a consensus or solution cannot be found, we recommend using a local Design Review Panel. Many local panels now offer BfL12 based workshops and review services. The emphasis of BfL12 is about getting people to work better together and create better places.

If a scheme is considered a potential candidate for Built for Life™ accreditation there will be independent scrutiny of developments once an application has secured planning approval. Through this independent review process, home buyers can have the confidence that Built for Life™ accreditation is the sign of a good place to live.



National policy and BfL12

Building For Life 12 Question	Links with the NPPF (2018)	Links with Planning Policy Guidance (2014*)
Integrating into the neighbourhood		
1. Connections	84, 91a), 98, 103, 104c), 108a)	006, 008, 012, 015, 022
2. Facilities and services	72b), 83d), 85a), 91a), 104a), 110, 118a), 127e), 129	006, 014, 015, 017
3. Public transport	84, 110a), 102c), 105c), 123a), 137b)	012, 014, 022
4. Meeting local housing requirements	14b) and c), 15, 73, 75-78, 92e), 118, 145g)	014, 015, 017
Creating a place		
5. Character	79e), 85a), 110c), 125, 170b) and c)	006, 007, 015, 020, 023
6. Working with the site and its context	57, 62, 72d), 84, 85, 104c), 108, 118, 121, 123c), 127e), 137, 158, 163, 168, 170a), 175, 180, 189	002, 007, 012, 020, 023
7. Creating well defined streets and spaces	8b), 91a), 102e), 110c), 127	008, 012, 021, 023
8. Easy to find your way around	8b), 91a), 110, 127	022
Street and home		
9. Streets for all	91a), 102, 110, 127d)	006, 008, 012, 022, 042
10. Car parking	122c), 105, 106	010, 040
11. Public and private space	8b) and c), 83d), 91b), 92a), 96, 97, 99-101, 127d), e) and f)	006, 007, 009, 010, 015, 016, 018
12. External storage and amenity	127	040

Generally:
 2018 NPPF: 124-127, 130, 131
 2014 PPG*: 001, 004, 005, 029, 031 – 038

*2014 paragraph references within 'Design' guidance category. PPG on design due to be updated in spring 2019, to align with 2018 NPPF (MHCLG, November 2019)

The Maidstone BfL has been approved and endorsed by the Council's **XXX** Committee. It is designed to be used to support consultation and community participation. It will also be used to: guide masterplans and design codes; frame pre-application discussions (applicants will be expected to self-assess their emerging proposals); inform design reviews; structure design and access statements; support local decision making, give a framework to the design section in committee reports (with the full BfL assessment potentially included as an appendix); and where necessary, justify conditions relating to detailed aspects of design, such as materials.

Credit: Kruczkowski, S

d:se

Design South East is a not-for-profit organisation and 100% independent. We facilitate understanding between local authorities, developers and local communities. We combine local knowledge with world-class expertise, providing clear, constructive and consistent advice on design issues. We provide great value for money, working alongside local authorities and developers to harness or complement their existing skills to create great buildings and spaces.

www.designsoutheast.org

