Briefing paper
Design for everyone:
a guide to the
design process
Community Led Design and Development is a programme funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government’s Tenant Empowerment Programme and is designed to put the community at the heart of new housing design. This briefing paper forms part of a suite of documents to help tenants, residents, housing associations and local authorities work together on the design and development of new housing.

This is the second of four papers. You may also be interested in:

- Briefing Paper 1: A neighbourhood guide to viability
- Briefing Paper 3: ‘Good housekeeping’ – working with partners and ensuring good governance
- Route map: A step-by-step guide to getting involved in housing projects

Introduction

This paper sets out the value of good design and in particular how tenants and residents can play a central role in decision making and thereby improving the design of improving the quality of new homes and neighbourhoods.

What is design and why is it important?

Design is a process that shapes how a home or an entire neighbourhood is developed. It involves decisions regarding height, form, materials, layout (both inside and outside), appearance and how public and private spaces around the homes are arranged.

Good design is important because new housing has a lasting impact on the people who live there and their quality of life. Good design should respond to three important principles:

1. Is it useful or functional:
   a. Does it provide for people’s needs, inside and outside their homes?
   b. Can they carry out their daily lives easily and feel safe and secure while doing so?
   c. Is it easy to get to and to move about in – to meet neighbours and build a sense of community?
   d. Is it an inclusive place for different people, eg, all age groups, and people with different mobility needs?
   e. Does it help to people to lead healthy lifestyles?

2. Is it durable and flexible to be useful for future generations?
   a. Can it be easily maintained?
   b. Can it be reconfigured to meet new needs?

3. Is it beautiful?
   a. Are people proud to live there?
   b. Do people feel at home?
   c. Does it have a memorable identity?
   d. Is it a place that works well with its surroundings and local history?

Many of these points are focused on those who will live in or live near or visit a development. The design of places also has a significant impact on landlords and housing associations that own and manage developments – for example, a well-designed place can be easier and cheaper to manage. If a place is attractive to future generations there is a long-term sustainability benefit which avoids the expense and waste associated with rebuilding homes.

Please note that this paper provides some initial advice on an approach to design only. The context for every project is different, and it is strongly recommended that your group seeks professional advice early on to help you understand all issues and risks that will affect your project.
The design process
Design is often described as an iterative process, which develops over time and may involve a number of people performing different roles, whether professionals, investors, residents, representatives of the community or special interest groups.

The design “team” usually means those that are responsible for working up all the design principles and requirements of the scheme into a set of plans. These drawings are used to communicate with everyone involved in the project and are included within any planning applications. The table on the next two pages summarises the professionals who will be involved or play a role in the design process.
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<tr>
<th>Types of professional involved in housing design</th>
<th>Role</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Architect</strong></td>
<td>The role of the architect is to design buildings such as houses. Architects may work at different scales – some may only be commissioned to design specific buildings, or they may be commissioned to produce a masterplan that sets out the layout of the whole site. They may also act as a lead for all the other design professionals that work on a scheme.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Urban Designer</strong></td>
<td>An urban designer will focus on designing how the whole site is laid out, how it makes connections with the external environment and how the streets and public spaces work.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Landscape Architect</strong></td>
<td>Also sometimes known as landscape designers, landscape architects design the paved or hard areas of public space and also the green or natural spaces within the scheme. This includes selecting the plants and water features, and how it will be maintained and managed.</td>
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<td><strong>Community Consultation Consultants</strong></td>
<td>The role of such consultants is to set up and run events with the community to explore their views, present design material and seek feedback. They may be architects or urban designers hired just for this role and may not be involved in the design itself.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Structural and Civil Engineers</strong></td>
<td>Engineers design and supervise construction of works, structures, and buildings. Their specialist skills can help ensure structures have sufficient strength to perform their function safely and allow best use to be made of the site.</td>
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## Other professionals who may be involved

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<tr>
<td><strong>Independent Tenant and resident Design Adviser</strong></td>
<td>Independent advisers are typically involved in redevelopment schemes where existing tenants with protected tenancies are being rehoused. Their role is to work with the tenants and act on their behalf to explain any technical or design terms, explore plans and capture views in closed sessions without their landlord.</td>
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<td><strong>Public Artist</strong></td>
<td>Artists can add richness by producing artworks or incorporate ideas for the design of features in the landscape or buildings. They can also be helpful in early engagement work to encourage young people and others to express their views through art projects.</td>
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<td><strong>Local Authority Highways Officers</strong></td>
<td>Highways officers consider how the development should be accessed by vehicles, pedestrians and cyclists in a safe manner from the existing street network. They work with the design team to ensure any streets and street lighting comply with local design requirements if the local authority is going to take over their management and maintenance (known as adoption).</td>
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<td><strong>Local Authority Planning Officers</strong></td>
<td>Planning officers assess a scheme when it becomes a planning application and check whether it is in compliance with the Local Plan – a statutory document that guides development across the authority. They make recommendations to the council planning committee to either approve or refuse the application. They will be involved in formal design discussions with the design team and will begin this process typically before it becomes a formal planning application (known as the pre-application stage).</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Local Authority - Other departments</strong></td>
<td>Other parts of a local authority may provide information or advice to the design team to ensure the scheme responds to local needs, eg provision of employment space, nurseries and schools, and community spaces; and meeting the needs of different age groups, eg older people. These functions may all be within one authority ('unitary') or be split between county and district or city authorities ('two tier').</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Other public bodies, eg, the Police, Healthcare professionals.</strong></td>
<td>Various external organisations may have a statutory role in giving their views on the design of a scheme when it is going through the planning process, or may be involved in helping to contribute ideas and technical information regarding what might be provided on the site (for example a doctor’s surgery).</td>
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The variety of people involved shows how many different subject areas and types of expertise are required, alongside the proper input and engagement of local people. However, best practice experience provides you with some pointers to bring about the best outcomes for any project. These include:

- **an effective client leading the project (see below)**
- clarity and honesty about the design process, roles and who will make decisions
- design training for local residents and those without professional design knowledge
- an inclusive approach to engaging with people.

**The client role**

A good client is absolutely critical to making a great housing scheme. As well as providing overall leadership and vision, the client is responsible for commissioning designers and contractors and making sure they deliver work to a satisfactory level. It is essential that the client is identified and everyone understands who they are. It may be the current landowner or landlord, a housing association, a community-led organisation or a consortium of various bodies.

A client is unlikely to be a single individual – a client team will need to be brought together and respective roles agreed. Experience has shown that successful community clients have tended to be a subgroup of an existing body of people that already work together, such as a tenant association. This may bring added benefits such as an established working relationship with the local council. The governance briefing paper helps communities and residents understand the benefits of different sorts of governance structures.

The client team would typically have the following roles within it:

**Project Leader** – they are clear on the agreed vision, ensure continued involvement and assistance from other bodies, and are able to make good decisions when needed. They keep people enthusiastic and work closely with the professionals and specialists. Typically they would chair client team meetings and achieve consensus.

**Project Manager** – they would bring information together, make day-to-day decisions, monitor progress, control the budget and check the detail of progress. Usually this is a separate person to the Project Leader to avoid confusion.

**Steering Group** – this includes representatives from organisations with specialist skills and representatives of stakeholders that could include local businesses, local community societies, and officers of the local authority. These external organisations could help provide valuable information and expertise to inform your decision-making; provide links to other projects that are occurring locally or offer funding streams for your project (for example sponsorship from local businesses). They could also become useful supporters and advocates for what you are trying to achieve.

**Design Champion** – this person needs to understand design and can help the group evaluate whether a good design is being proposed. They should not be the same as the design consultant contracted to deliver the project, in order to retain an independent view.

Further information on the client role can be found in a range of Cabe client guides which are available on Design Council’s website, including: Creating Excellent Masterplans, It’s Our Space and Creating Excellent Buildings.
Honesty and clarity on roles, decision-making and communications

A clear structure and communications between all parties in the design process is essential to avoiding misunderstandings and building trust. This is best managed through a formal communication strategy so the message is consistent across all channels. It is important whatever structure is used that the status of residents and their role in decision-making is clearly spelled out.

There are range of roles a community could take:

- **Community as client** – The community leads the project and commissions design input, working with its commissioned designers to develop the scheme.

- **Community having representation within a client decision-making body** – In the Horfield case study the client role was taken by the Housing Association – Bristol Community Housing Foundation, set up for the regeneration project and tenants were formally represented through tenant members on their board.

- **Community is not the client but has significant input into the design process from the start** – The client makes decisions based on information and the outcomes from significant engagement on design with the community. This was the situation in Ealing with the Green Man Lane Estate (see case study).

- **Community is not the client but is consulted on the design options developed by the client’s design advisers but without a strong engagement in the design from the start.**

Benefits of training in the design process

The design process may seem very complicated to those that are unfamiliar with it. Best practice evidence shows that the design process works more smoothly, conflict is reduced and trust is improved between parties if efforts are made to train everyone in the basics of design and the design process, and people are encouraged to assess existing and new places objectively. Training is generally better received, especially by residents, if it is delivered by an independent body. It can allow people to ask questions openly and can boost their confidence and willingness to take part in design discussions later on. Training can help people read plans, interrogate design documents, and understand best practice examples.

Design training can also be helpful for some of the professionals involved – for example those in day-to-day housing management - as they may not have had recent experience of the design and development process and yet may be contributing to decision-making on the scheme.
The design process itself and its stages
The design process will depend on whether the client is a community group, landlord or local authority and the way the development will be procured. For some projects there may be a design team already working with the client, or there may be competitive selection processes to go through to choose a design team, where each bidder has to create a draft design in advance.

Fundamentally, there are four stages that would be common to any development process: prepare, design, construct and use/occupy. This sits alongside the statutory planning process. For larger schemes there may be various design phases, including preparing an overall masterplan and then detailed designs for each of the phases of development.

The design process

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<th>Prepare</th>
<th>Design</th>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Use</th>
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<tr>
<td>Establish the client team</td>
<td>Commence design work</td>
<td>Appoint contractor</td>
<td>Implement management and maintenance plan</td>
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<td>Establish partnerships with key stakeholders</td>
<td>Develop sketch or outline design</td>
<td>Start work on site</td>
<td>Celebrate opening</td>
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<td>Identify, consult and involve people</td>
<td>Develop detailed design</td>
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<td>People move in</td>
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<tr>
<td>Understand the site</td>
<td>Submit planning application</td>
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<tr>
<td>Appoint a design team</td>
<td>Achieve planning consent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Develop a vision for the site</td>
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<td>Develop the brief</td>
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Benefits of taking an inclusive approach
Best practice shows that it is important to take an inclusive approach to the involvement of the community, whoever the client may be. If you are a public body there are statutory obligations placed on you by the Equality Act 2010. This requires you to act in specific ways towards people across seven protected characteristics – age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

Even without this obligation, being inclusive brings significant benefits to your project whether you are landlord or resident. If you are inclusive you are capturing the views of everyone – this will lead to a greater range of ideas, richer information and more community buy-in during the design process and beyond into construction and occupation. Being inclusive can mean you avoid making costly mistakes if you create housing or public space that is not well used or liked and requires expensive redesign in the future.

There are many guides and sources of advice on how to be inclusive – Design Council’s Inclusive Design Hub has collated some of the most important (see Design Council website). In simple terms you need to think of everyone who may live or use the development and find techniques to engage them in the design process in ways that they feel comfortable. Some traditional approaches such as meetings in community halls can exclude those who do not feel comfortable for cultural or personal reasons expressing their views in a public event. The location of the event may have connotations that exclude certain people - faith environments, for example, may feel exclusionary to some. Training key client team members and wider community representatives in inclusion may be beneficial to spread awareness of inclusive behaviours and best practice approaches to activities.
Data collection
At the initial start-up of a project you should collect as much information as possible about the site – historic maps, plans, information on the wider local area; details of where the local amenities are, including public transport routes; local planning documents and health, demographic and census information; and details on local community groups and civic societies. All of this material will be useful for engaging with residents and other stakeholders.

Initial community engagement – Issues and ideas
When beginning the conversation about a place you should solicit a wide range of views from the community. The people who live in a place are often the best informed as to how it works, what they value locally and how people move about in the area. They can help inform the design team of what gives the place identity and history.

You may find that initial engagement exercises can be negative as well as positive. People may focus on problems with the existing housing and public space, or on examples of poor maintenance/neglect. It is important to be realistic with residents about when change might happen and what might be possible in the interim to improve peoples’ situations.

DA1 Design Visioning
A design vision focuses on what everyone wants to see happen. It describes in words, images and diagrams:

– the kind of place people want
– physical, economic and social aspirations for the area
– how much change may be needed, of what type and over what time
– realistic outcomes for development.

Your vision can draw on examples of good practice from other places to illustrate your aspirations but should always be specific to the place rather than making general statements that could apply to anywhere.
Preparing your vision – step-by-step

1. Understanding your local context:

   There are a range of ways to capture information about the local context to your site. For example:

   a) Mobile activities
   1. Walking around your neighbourhood either all together (sometimes called ‘walkabouts’) or in smaller groups can help bring out features and places that are valued (including highlighting features that may have local importance that are no longer there). Walkabouts, because of their more informal feel and by the simple fact of being out in their own neighbourhood, can encourage residents to feel more confident to contribute their thoughts and local stories compared to a formal meeting.
   2. Photovisioning – taking photos as you walk around can show what you do or don’t like, and why. Often it will highlight how people look at a place differently to others.
   3. Using specific tools such as Spaceshaper or Placecheck - these can help you assess public spaces or neighbourhoods and record your findings in questionnaires and mobile applications.
   4. Mapping journeys – investigating how different people walk or move through the area (where do they start, where do they go, how do they feel during different parts of the journey?) can illustrate how many places have complex “webs” of users and activities during the day and night. It avoids simplistic assumptions on how a place is used, particularly by those involved in the design process who don’t live there or know a place well.

   b) Group activities
   1. Community mood boards – “I love place X because” can help a group collate material into a collage that can be used to stimulate discussion and debate
   2. School engagement – design exercises such as building or drawing your ideal house, or writing stories about what you like about where you live can help people talk positively about how it could be improved
   3. Film and video activity – for example producing a documentary or talking-heads programme to capture views. This can be popular with children of all ages including older teenagers.

   c) Room-based activities
   1. Design charrettes – often used for larger sites, these are hands-on days where a design team will explore design ideas with paper and pens, models and plenty of visual material. Because they are done with and in front of residents, charrettes can clearly demonstrate to them that their views are being taken on board. It helps demystify what designers do and that the design will evolve over time. During a charrette it should be clear to residents what is open for discussion and change and what has already been fixed within the design.
   2. ‘Postcards from the future’ – people imagine what they would write positively to a friend in the future about where they live. This helps people think about what the potential of the place might be, and how their homes and lives might be better.
   3. Role playing – people thinking in the shoes of others, eg, people who are different to them or don’t live in a place yet. It is important to not assume everyone is the same and to think positively about change in the future – that new people may come and live in the place with different experiences and family structures.
2. Getting ideas from elsewhere:
Going to visit other places to see examples of what has worked well is invaluable. It can be an opportunity to meet those involved in a project and learn from their experiences in delivering good design first-hand. Case studies are another learning tool that can also be useful reference material. CABE has more than 400 case studies on its archived website. Search for Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment National Archive.

3. Analysing the material and drafting the vision:
When establishing a vision it will be important to prioritise the material and findings. This process may require an external facilitator to help you list priorities and debate their merits. Inevitably, a vision will not capture everything said but instead should reach a conclusion through consensus and guided decision-making.

DA2 Design Brief
Once you have prepared a design vision, you should create or help the client organisation create a design brief for a place. This is a document that goes into more detail than the vision to describe the key aspects of design that you want addressed in any development that may occur there. It would be used by a professional design team (See table 4 and 5) to draw up a detailed design. The design brief for a housing project will depend on the scale and nature of the project but should cover:

- the type and range of housing to be provided
- how the development connects to the local area
- ways in which the layout of streets and housing could be arranged
- how much car parking to provide and where it may go
- what public space (green space and hard public spaces, eg, squares, pedestrian routes) needs to be provided
- expected environmental and other standards to be met
- how community facilities might be provided.
DA3 Design development following appointment of the design team
If you are acting as the client you will want to find a design team that understands how to work collaboratively on the design of the project. You may at this stage have developed some options for how the design could develop and will need to decide on a means to resolve which option is best. The design team’s experience and creative thinking may create fresh opportunities. You may want to widen out input at this stage – perhaps by holding a public exhibition and a vote. Involve others by producing material that can be sent to all residents and encourage them to talk to neighbours and friends.

The design process continues all the way through to the point where a development starts on site. Fresh challenges will crop up as you understand the site and construction costs in more detail, which may result in some changes. New ideas may emerge that improve the design or solve a problem which benefits the scheme or reduces costs. Always remember to refer back to your original vision to check that you are not making compromises that affect what you originally wanted to achieve.

DA4 Finalising the design
Once the design is nearly finalised the client will want to submit the scheme for planning permission. This will involve the collation of a significant amount of material both from community engagement and also specific technical and design information from specialist advisers.

Once planning permission is granted the client will want to begin the process of procuring or selecting a contractor to build the scheme. If the client is a local authority or housing association the developer or contractor may already have been selected with the design team as a partnership. There comes a point where the design must be fixed, otherwise changes can become very expensive.

DA5 Construction
It is critical at this stage that the original design team remains involved in the project to supervise construction. Without this there is potential for particular aspects of the scheme to be changed to suit the contractor rather than delivering the original design vision and detailed design itself.

DA6 Use or occupation
Once people move in, and the landscape features begin to grow and mature, it is important to keep listening to residents to understand what is and isn’t working well, and whether any changes can be made to the design of later phases. This feedback can also inform other projects being carried out by the same landlord or other communities who may be embarking on projects nearby.

Great Bow Yard, Longport © Design for Homes/ Richard Mallare
Techniques and Tools: Building for Life 12

Building for Life 12 is a useful tool for assessing the quality of homes and neighbourhoods using principles of good urban design. It is particularly helpful if there are problems with design that your group want to pinpoint and address. There are 12 questions overall and a traffic light system is used to score each question. The questions are divided into three chapters with four questions under each chapter, starting with the wider neighbourhood then focusing on the street and homes:

**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-designed 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 and 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?