# 05  Urban Design Policies in the Walsall Context

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# Urban Design Policies in the Walsall Context

**Successful streets, spaces, villages, towns and cities tend to have characteristics in common, which can be summarised and explained under the headings of the Urban Design Policies below. They are useful to establish what qualities should be sought to create a successful place.**

There is overlap between the Urban Design Policies and they are mutually reinforcing. These principles have set the basis for Policies DW1-10 contained within Designing Walsall and should be applied to the vision for designing in Walsall.

## Sustainability

simultaneously meeting environmental, economic and community needs without compromising the needs of future generations

## Safe and Welcoming Places

creating places that feel safe, secure and welcoming for everyone

## Character

a place with its own identity

## Continuity

a place defined by buildings, structures and landscape

## High Quality Public Realm

creating places with attractive environmental quality

## Ease of Movement

a place that is easy to get to and safe to move through

## Legibility

a place that has a clear image and identity and is easy to understand

## Diversity

a place that offers a mix of activities to the widest range of possible users

## Adaptability

a space that can easily change over time

## Well Designed Sustainable Buildings

buildings that contribute positively to a comfortable, adaptable and sustainable built environment

Waterfront South

"Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, is indivisible from good planning, and should contribute positively to making places better for people" (NPPF: Requiring Good Design)

# Policy DW1 Sustainability

**New development should seek to simultaneously meet environmental, economic and community needs without compromising the needs of future generations**

Sustainability lies at the heart of high quality design. It is integral to and underpins all of the other urban design policies in Designing Walsall and this, along with the importance Walsall Council places on achieving sustainable development, is reflected in its position as the first policy in the document.

Sustainable design should form a central theme within any design concept so that it is embedded within the design solution. Opportunities to reuse buildings, thereby using existing embedded energy are an important consideration at the start of the design process. Following this, new build should address matters of orientation, aspect, solar gain and insulation. This fabric first approach is important in ensuring new design is fundamentally sound in terms of achieving current applicable Code for Sustainable Homes and BREEAM levels. Finally, recycling and renewable technologies should be secured and made integral to the design of buildings and not added after the initial design concept is fixed. 'Green technologies' need to be integral to the design solution and not added after the initial design concept and obscured as part of a retro-fit, but boldly used.

The challenge of creating socially, environmentally and economically sustainable neighbourhoods should be seen as an exciting opportunity to produce innovative development and outstanding design quality that will contribute to the mitigation of, and adaptation to, the effects of climate change.

In raising the standard of sustainable development in Walsall, good urban design can deliver safe, attractive and sustainable places of enduring quality that can provide for the needs of today's population as well as for future generations.

The benefits of adopting a sustainable approach to design are:

- A better quality of living and working environment
- Reductions in costs and overheads
- Improved efficiency in the use of buildings
- Reduced fuel costs
- Improved marketability

## Environmental Sustainability

- Where historic assets are affected and sustainable technologies are to be employed, more considered solutions that allow these elements to co-exist with historic fabric and decoration must be had.

- New development proposals must show how their design maximises energy efficiency in term of layout, orientation and sustainable use of resources.

- New development must be designed to provide a percentage of their total predicted energy requirements on site from the sun, water, ground and wind, in that order of preference.

- New development proposals are expected to incorporate measures for the conservation of water resources and sustainable management of drainage and flood risk both to and from the development. When considering flood risk management, this includes considering opportunities for both managing flood risk to the site and wider community and flood resilient design and construction.

- Walsall Borough is an Air Quality Management Area. Developers will be expected to demonstrate that new development will not adversely affect environmental quality or the health of the borough's residents.

- Development proposals are required to make appropriate provision for the sustainable management and discharge of waste, including facilities for storage and collection of recyclable waste which are integrated into the design of the scheme.

- New development must make a positive contribution to the greening of the urban environment and supporting biodiversity.

- New development must strive to achieve improvements in water quality, enhancement to water habitats and a reduction in flood risk. As a minimum it must not cause any deterioration in water quality, damage to water habitats or increase in flood risk.

- New development is expected to take account of existing buildings and materials to be used and consider whether the building and/or materials can be re-used and whether materials can be sourced locally.

- Walsall Council expects developers to respond to Walsall's broader social sustainability agenda by designing new development to contain an appropriate housing mix which will promote sustainable, inclusive and mixed communities.

- Opportunities for engaging the community in the design process will be encouraged.

- Incorporating community-led design, particularly in the evolution of public amenities such as public art and play spaces, will be supported.

- Developers are encouraged to make use of social and community enterprises, third sector and charity relationships in designing and constructing new development.

## Economic sustainability

- Walsall Council is aiming to maximise the economic advantages to the borough that can be derived from larger development programmes by linking developers with key local partners to economic benefits. Developers will be encouraged to make use of local businesses, contractors and suppliers, as well as the use of local labour.

- Wherever possible the use of locally sourced materials that contribute to enhancing character or reinforcing local distinctiveness should be employed.

## Design Guidance References:

Building for Life:

- Chapter on Environment and community

Walsall Bus Station

"It is important to plan positively for the achievement of high quality and inclusive design for all development, including individual buildings, public and private spaces and wider area development schemes" (NPPF: Requiring Good Design)

Seedum roof on community building, Palfrey Park

Town Wharf, Walsall

"Ensure that developments...create safe and accessible environments where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine quality of life or community cohesion" (NPPF: Requiring Good Design)

# Policy DW2 Safe and Welcoming Places

**All new development must contribute towards creating places that feel safe, secure and welcoming for everyone**

Designing Walsall has been informed by discussions with many people across the borough of Walsall. In response to the question 'What makes an area a good place to live, work or visit?' there was overwhelming agreement that a good place has to be a safe place that makes everyone feel welcome.

- Residents must feel safe and secure in their homes and going about their daily lives, visitors must feel that places are welcoming and businesses must be able to operate in a safe and secure environment.

- All opportunities to introduce natural surveillance should be taken so as to allow neighbourhoods and districts of the borough to be more self policing and reduce the need for CCTV cameras and other surveillance and excessive security solutions and technology.

- New development must be designed in a way that makes routes, streets, waterways and spaces as safe, welcoming, attractive and free from crime as possible.

- Opportunities for crime against property and the occupants of buildings must be minimised without compromising the visual quality of the townscape and landscape.

- The design and layout of developments should provide natural surveillance and well-trafficked routes to prevent and reduce the fear of crime whilst ensuring that privacy is not infringed.

- Different sources and patterns of lighting must be considered for different environments and developments.

## Design Guidance References:

Design and Access Statements:

- Sections on  use, layout, appearance and access

Building for Life:

- Chapter on Streets, parking and pedestrianisation

"Achieve places which promote...safe and accessible developments, containing clear and legible pedestrian routes, and high quality public space, which encourage the active and continual use of public areas" (NPPF: Promoting Healthy Communities)

NG STREET

ACCORD HOUSING ASSOCIATION

TOWN HALL
VICTORIA PARK
LIBRARY
PUBLIC TOILETS

"Local Planning Authorities should take into account the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness" (NPPF: Conserving and enhancing the historic environment)

The Fold, Darlaston

# Policy DW3 Character

## All new development must be designed to respect and enhance local identity

Walsall has a rich history and this is visible in many of its buildings, streets and spaces. New development needs to fully appraise the positive and negative aspects within its historic context and find through this opportunities to enhance local identity.  New development can improve the character of areas where they are fragmented, have seen under investment or poorly maintained.

Design and Access Statements must be used as a positive tool, not only to demonstrate mitigation of harm, but the positive aspects that new development can contribute to.

Development proposals must appraise the character of an area by assessing typical building heights, rhythms, materials as well as details and architectural solutions. There are situations when complying with these characteristics is warranted and opportunities when stepping out of line and breaking the rules can be justified to make a statement, but these circumstances must be clearly justified and boldly delivered.

Walsall Council expects new development to be informed by the surrounding character and to respond in a positive way to it by reflecting local urban design characteristics such as street patterns, building scale, topography and culture.

All new development that draws on historic character (either literally or through interpretation) shall be evidence based drawing references from the following:

- Conservation Area Appraisal;
- Streetly Area of Special Townscape Character;
- The Historic Environment Record (HER);
- The Black Country Historic Landscape Characterisation; and
- Other academic research into the historic character of an area or place.

### Design Guidance References:

By Design:
- Objective – Character

Design and Access Statements:
- Sections on appearance

Building for Life:
- Chapter on Character

"Permission should be refused for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions" (NPPF: Requiring Good Design)

Lower Hall Street, Walsall

# Policy DW4 Continuity

**Where the context of a site presents a repetitive design characteristic, this should be reflected in the design of the new development**

Some areas of Walsall are predominantly terraced, with housing at back of pavement and two-storeys in height, whilst others contain handed pairs of villas behind formal gardens. Where such characteristics are evident and dominate the original design principle of the area, they should be embedded into the new design.

Continuity can still be abstract and break the rules by bringing in a new take on an historic solution.  The English Heritage Guidance (Building in Context) explores this theme further and shows how new development can provide continuity without stagnating creativity.

- New development proposals must give consideration to common building lines and how the development will give definition to streets and spaces to reinforce the existing urban structure and give significance to important streets and spaces.

- A clear distinction between public space and private space should be inherent within all new development.

- New development must consider the accessibility of new buildings and spaces, in particular locating entrances in safe places, for both people who are able-bodied and people with disabilities.

## Design Guidance References:

By Design:
- Objective – Continuity and enclosure

Building for Life:
- Chapter on Character

Building in Context
- Case study 8 & 11

"Ensure that developments...establish a strong sense of place, using streetscapes and buildings to create attractive and comfortable places to live, work and visit" (NPPF: Requiring Good Design)

"Plans and decisions should take account of whether...safe and suitable access to the site can be achieved for all people" (NPPF: Promoting Sustainable Transport)

Park Street, Walsall

# Policy DW5 Ease of Movement

**All new development should contribute to creating places that are well connected, easy to get to and safe to move through**

The convenience, safety and comfort with which people can reach and move through buildings, places and spaces and between key facilities across the borough play a large part in determining how successful Walsall's regeneration will be.

All towns and cities function on a network of connected routes and spaces which form a movement framework for a variety of users: public, private, bicycle, on foot, people with disabilities. Movement networks should form a hierarchy of routes which reflect the nature of the main users and which need to be easy to navigate and safe to use to encourage everyone to use them on a regular basis and at different times of the day or night. A well-designed urban structure has a network of connected spaces and routes for pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles.

People living and working in Walsall need to get around easily and safely and enjoy the experience of everyday or one-off journeys, in order to deliver a sustainable neighbourhood.

Providing good access across public realm, through sites and into buildings is central to modern and inclusive living. The barriers presented by the natural environment and built heritage should be managed in a creative and responsive way that ensures that access solutions are integrated and not over engineered and dominant.

- New development must show how it has prioritised meeting the needs of pedestrians and encouraging sustainable modes of transport such as walking, cycling and public transport usage to reduce reliance on the car.

- The needs of all users of development must be considered in line with the Equality Act 2010 so that all barriers to all forms of disability are adequately addressed in an imaginative way.

- New development should connect into existing routes and movement patterns to provide easy access and clear permeability through integrating with a network of routes including streets, canals, paths and open spaces to provide visible, safe and attractive connections between destinations.

- New development is expected to demonstrate how it helps to establish or reinforce a sustainable movement network through taking account of the location of the nearest public transport facilities, public amenities like schools, shops and parks that are accessible on foot or by bicycle.

- Where required, developers are expected to develop robust employer or residential travel plans with sustainable travel initiatives that give the users informed travel choices and encourages them to adopt a more sustainable mode of travel wherever possible.

## Design Guidance References:

By Design:
- Aspect Objective – Ease of movement

Design and Access Statements:
- Sections on layout, character and access

Building for Life:
- Chapter on Streets, parking and pedestrianisation

"Successful development depends on good access and connections. The connections between a site and its surroundings are important for even the smallest of developments" (Urban Design Compendium, 2000)

"achieve places which promote...safe and accessible developments, containing clear and legible pedestrian routes, and high quality public space, which encourage the active and continual use of public areas." (NPPF: Promoting healthy communities)

Walsall College

# Policy DW6 Legibility

## New development should contribute to creating a place that has a clear image and identity and is easy to understand

A place that is legible will be easy to understand and pleasant to live, work or visit. Development must be designed so that people can find their way around without being confused or feeling lost. If people can find their way around a place easily it helps them to feel safe and at ease in their surroundings.

Places should be linked by clear and visible routes. New development should make use of new and existing physical features to help people orientate themselves whether this is on a townscape scale with a view of a church spire or on a more intimate scale with distinctive public art or street furniture.

Using simple urban design principles, such as building hierarchy, defined street enclosure and direct routes, enable natural orientation to take place.  Links between new and existing neighbourhoods should be natural and logical rather than a sequence of conflicting spaces.

Consultation with local communities revealed that legible places with a distinctive identity or memorable character such as Willenhall town centre and Pelsall Common are the most valued.

- All new development is expected to make a positive contribution to the identity of the area in which it is located and to contribute to a legible environment, whether the proposal is a single building on an existing street or a large development site.
- New development must design a hierarchy of streets and ensure that design proposals give careful consideration to how the built environment is experienced by pedestrians.

- New development must maximise its potential to enhance local distinctiveness by making positive visual connections with its surrounding environment, for example key vistas of important buildings and landmarks, memorable pieces of public art and reinforcing visual connections through coherent groups of street furniture such as lighting, benches and signage.
- The design of new development should ensure that the functions of buildings and spaces can be easily interpreted and that the entrances to them are appropriately located and visible.

### Design Guidance References:

By Design:
- Objective – Legibility

Design and Access Statements:
- Sections on layout, landscape and appearance

Building for Life:
- Chapter on Streets, parking and pedestrianisation

"Local planning authorities should take into account...the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness" (NPPF: Conserving and enhancing the historic environment)

Community Event at The Bridge, Walsall

"Ensure that developments...create and sustain an appropriate mix of uses" (NPPF: Requiring good design)

# Policy DW7 Diversity

**All new development should contribute to creating lively places and opportunities to sustain the widest range of possible users**

**Walsall enjoys a diverse and vibrant community which adds richness, vitality and activity to the urban environment. Diversity not only supports a range of uses but secures social cohesion, equality and communities of differing cultural activity.**

- New development must incorporate an appropriate and balanced mix of uses that add richness and variety to the local area to promote compact sustainable neighbourhoods through mixed uses and innovative design.

- New development should give thought to how diversity can be added at different times of the day and night by promoting an appropriate night-time economy.

- Development proposals are expected to demonstrate how consideration has been given to accommodating all sections of society and, where possible, providing for these diverse needs to add richness to the social and cultural variety of the local area. This includes designing an appropriate range of tenures and housing types to respond to local needs and ensuring that the design quality of buildings and facilities is of an equally high standard for everyone in the community.

- New development should be designed to support variety and choice in the public realm for all sections of the local community by providing or sustaining a network of routes, streets and paths that maximises choices for movement, particularly for pedestrians, cyclists and users of public transport and contributing to a range of open spaces to meet the different needs of the local community for active and passive recreation and leisure.

## Design Guidance References:

By Design:
- Objective – Diversity

Design and Access Statements:
- Sections on use, amount, appearance and access

Building for Life:
- Chapter on Environment and community

"achieve places which promote...opportunities for meetings between members of the community who might not otherwise come into contact with each other, including through mixed-use developments, strong neighbourhood centres and active street frontages which bring together those who work, live and play in the vicinity" (NPPF: Promoting healthy communities)

The Crossing

Crossing

SHOPS          RESTAURANT

The Crossing, Walsall

# Policy DW8 Adaptability

**New development should contribute to creating flexible and adaptable places that can easily change over time**

It is important that buildings and spaces can respond to changes in technology, the environment, market conditions and living circumstances. The most successful places have prospered in changing circumstances.

Some buildings and spaces in Walsall have stood the test of time and have been used in a variety of ways over the years, whilst others have failed to respond successfully to the restructuring of the economy.  The lack of flexibility in much post war construction has resulted in a fairly short lifespan and these lessons should be learnt in ongoing regeneration activities across the borough. Adaptability enables buildings and spaces to have a long life, creating a flexible and sustainable environment that can also adapt in the face of climate change.

- The reuse of existing buildings is sequentially preferable to the construction of new buildings and in many cases historic buildings have been found to be highly adaptable and can lend themselves to a range of new uses.  As such, the reuse of buildings should be fully considered and their demolition clearly justified on sound design and sustainability grounds in advance of the preparation of designs for replacement buildings.

- New build proposals and layouts are expected to demonstrate how they will be capable of accommodating changing and future needs, for example allowing for movement and visual connections to be made to adjoining areas in the event of future redevelopment and designing open spaces to be used for different recreational, leisure, cultural and social activities and events.

- Development proposals for new buildings or the conversion of existing buildings should demonstrate how they have been designed to allow for their future adaptation to meet the changing needs of their occupants and of the local area, including flexible accommodation space to meet the accommodation and mobility needs of household as they change over time.

## Design Guidance References:

By Design:
- Objective – Adaptability

Design and Access Statements:
- Sections on use, amount, layout, landscaping and access

Building for Life:
- Chapter on environment and community

Building in Context
- Case study 9 and 15

"Ensure that developments...will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development" (NPPF: Requiring good design)

"Ensure that developments...are visually attractive as a result of good architecture and appropriate landscaping." (NPPF: Requiring good design)

Darwall St, Walsall

# Policy DW9 High Quality Public Realm

**New development must seek to ensure it creates places with attractive environmental quality that responds to the buildings and uses around it**

**Streets and spaces form the 'public realm' – those parts of towns and villages that are available for use by everyone. The public realm is the public 'face' of Walsall where people walk, meet, rest and interact.**

**An attractive public realm enhances people's quality of life and the perception of a place. Public space includes streets, squares, canals waterways, parks and recreational areas and provides a widely accessible stage for the expression of arts and creativity. It is an integral part of the urban fabric and should make a positive contribution to reinforcing the local distinctiveness of the built environment of Walsall. Public space should be accessible to all members of the community (in accordance with Policy DW5).**

**A quality public realm plays a key role in establishing the environmental quality experienced by people within the borough. It is achieved through well considered materials, planting, street furniture, signage, art, drainage and other highway infrastructure. Investment in these key elements can turn public spaces into memorable and enjoyable places. Public space, the way it is enclosed, the activity that takes place round its edges and within it, the choice of surface treatments, the maintenance of the space and its creative input all contribute to its image and quality.**

- New development should conceptualise public realm and external landscaping works at the outset of a new development as part of the overall design and support an attractive, safe environment which prioritises the comfort of pedestrians and vulnerable transport users and contributes a sense of animation and activity to the street, including an element of on-street car parking where appropriate.

- Public realm must relate to the buildings and uses that sustain it. The positioning of structures and items within it should not impede movement, yet its design should accommodate spaces where activity can be sustained. Design of public realm should always be geared to accommodate a multitude of uses and be flexible enough to respond to the changing circumstances of the buildings and uses that relate to it.

- Commercial uses, for example supermarkets, retail units, industrial premises, offices, and leisure uses must be designed to make a positive contribution to a sustainable and attractive public realm through maximising the amount of 'active' building frontage and omitting blank walls, service areas and other 'dead' frontages facing the public realm wherever possible.

- The public realm can be enhanced by designing buildings to respect and enhance local distinctiveness by paying regard to the urban structure, scale, form, massing and character of the local area.

- High quality materials, public art and landscaping are essential components of a high quality public realm.

- New development must support a drive to provide a public realm of streets and spaces that is designed to be visually attractive and engender civic pride and stewardship.

- New development is expected to support a comfortable microclimate and provide appropriate protection for pedestrians from inclement weather such as maximising south-facing sunny spaces and avoiding the creation of wind tunnels.

## Design Guidance References:

By Design:
- Objective – Quality of the public realm

Design and Access Statements:
- Sections on use, access, landscaping and access

Building for Life:
- Chapter on Character

**"Analysis of successful communities increasingly points to a quantifiable relationship between economic success and the quality of the public realm. Carefully designed, well-managed streets are not merely a desirable outcome of successful economies; they are an important driver of such success" (Streets for All, 2005)**

## Provision of Public Art through Section 106 agreements

All types of development attract increasing numbers of people into and across the borough, making it ever more important that the public realm, or public face, of Walsall is of the highest quality and reflects Walsall's own unique character and locally distinctive attribiutes. Policy DW9 below builds on UDP policy ENV34 and sets out how development will be expected to contribute towards public realm improvements and the provision of public art.

## Policy DW9(a) Planning Obligations and Qualifying Development

Where appropriate, the Council will seek provision of public realm improvements and public art in the following locations:

- In public spaces and buildings

- In important and prominent locations

- In waterway settings

- In larger scale developments or refurbishments

- In the Growth Network (Walsall Strategic Centre and Regeneration Corridors), and town, district and local centres

Public art installation, Victoria Park, Darlaston

Darwall Street, Walsall

whg Head Office, Walsall

# Policy DW10 Well Designed Sustainable Buildings

**New development should make a positive contribution to creating a comfortable, adaptable and sustainable built environment**

Buildings that are designed to last, that contribute positively to the townscape of Walsall and provide its occupants with good living, working, social and learning environments will help raise the image and urban quality of the Borough. Sustainable buildings that are robust, durable, fit for purpose and designed to adapt to changes in society, economy, technology and climate change will be an investment in Walsall's future.

Existing buildings play an important role in securing sustainable buildings.  Buildings already in place contain embodied energy within their built fabric and their reuse can often be more sustainable than complete rebuilding with new materials.   Older buildings can be reused imaginatively with contemporary alterations, giving them new leases of life and can harbour sustainability credentials that match their modern counterparts.

- The careful design and detailing of buildings must make a positive contribution to their surroundings and the quality of life of their occupants with a strong emphasis on respecting and enhancing local distinctiveness.

- New development is expected to contribute to the sustainable use of resources and make prudent and efficient use of finite and non-renewable resources, including optimising natural light and ventilation.

- Proposals for new development are expected to meet Code for Sustainable Homes Level 3 or above on residential schemes, and Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM) Very Good or above for other development, unless otherwise justified.

## Design Guidance References:

Design and Access Statements:
- Sections on use, amount and access

Building for Life:
- Chapter on Environment and community

Building in Context
- Case study 5

"Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, is indivisible from good planning, and should contribute positively to making places better for people." (NPPF: Requiring good design)