

**The Draft Birmingham Design Guide**

**The Birmingham ID City Manual**

DRAFT

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## UNDERSTANDING CHARACTER

### CITY NOTE ID-1: Elements of a Character Assessment

As detailed by Design Principle 2, architects and designers must demonstrate an understanding and acknowledgement of their site's surrounding context, via a character assessment that evaluates the key characteristics of the surrounding area. A design response can then be created that acknowledges and enhances its surroundings.

## NEIGHBOURHOODS

The majority of new development is located within or adjacent to existing development. As such new proposals must seek to enhance and integrate with these existing communities, through considered designs that respond to their neighbourhood structure:

### Densities

Is there a well-defined local density that has been established by existing development, contributing to surrounding character? What are the densities within the surrounding area? Would the introduction of a different density impact on, or enhance the character of the area?

### Streets, roads and routes

Is there a clear hierarchy of streets, routes and spaces? What are the widths of the surrounding streets? Are there clear street patterns? Do the streets and surrounding area have defined building lines? Does development tightly enclose streets or is it setback? What role do the streets serve? Do streets contain footways, verges, trees and/or on-street parking? Do non-vehicular routes form part of the surrounding streetscape? Do buildings successfully overlook and interact with existing routes and spaces?

### Plot widths / block widths / urban grain

What is the nature of surrounding urban grain? Is the surrounding area dominated by large detached residential plots, with generous gardens and wide frontage, or is it predominantly terraced houses in well defined, gridded urban blocks? Do large buildings dominate the area, creating an open form with limited definition? Is there scope to reinstate an urban grain that has become eroded?

### Land uses

Is the surrounding area dominated by a particular use or group of uses? How do these uses impact on the wider character of the area? Should these uses be a consideration or influential in guiding future development and uses in the area? Are there land / use designations that need to be given specific consideration (specific use, historic assets or nature conservation)?

### Topography / Views / focal points / skyline

How does existing development lie within the landscape and utilise it? Has the existing built form created focal points and landmarks? How are these features enclosed and framed? Does the existing built form create and frame views of buildings, public art or landscape? Has a distinct skyline been created by feature buildings and/or the nature of the landscape? Do new developments have the potential to interrupt or impact such features?

### Public realm / art / landscape

What role does public realm, art and/or landscape play in characterising the surrounding area? Are there mature landscape features that add to character? Is there a defined materials and/or materials palette? Is the public realm dominated by hard or soft landscape? Are streets framed by hedgerows or trees? Does the site and surrounding fall within a distinct or important landscape character?\*

*\*It may be appropriate to undertake a wider landscape character assessment of an area, to understand the quality and potential impact of development.*

### Cultural & social mapping

What are the cultural and social demographics of the surrounding area? Are there community needs / desires that could be helped or supported by development? Could the existing community be actively engaged in the development journey of the site? Are there wellbeing, health, cultural or leisure benefits that development could provide? What resources exist in the community that development could utilise?

## **BUILDINGS & THEIR USES**

Beyond the neighbourhood structure of an existing area, proposals must recognise and acknowledge that characteristics of the buildings located within the surrounding neighbourhood and adjacent to a site:

### Role of buildings

Is there a hierarchy of buildings with clear roles within their surroundings? Are there landmark buildings and focal points? Are there heritage assets that require specific consideration and design response?

### Architectural styles & detailing

Is there defining architectural style or period within the surrounding area? Are there architectural details and features associated with these buildings? Do they contribute to the proportions and rhythm of the building and façade? How are facades articulated? How are rain water goods managed and detailed?

### Façade emphasis

Do adjacent buildings have a clear vertical or horizontal emphasis? What role do window proportions, recesses, designs and sizes play in this?

### Materials

Is there a dominant palette of materials within the surrounding area? Are there specific colours, styles and finishes associated with these materials?

### Scale & massing

What are the scale and mass of the surrounding buildings? Is there a well-defined local vernacular or a mix of scales and sizes? Have architectural features or steps in heights been used to help reduce the mass of buildings?

### Roof scape

Is there a particular roof style or design dominant within the surrounding area? Are there consistent ridgelines and/or eave heights? Do chimneys form part of the roofscape?

### Outdoor space

Do buildings have outdoor amenity space? Where is this located and how does it relate to the building? Do these spaces contribute to the wider character of the area? Are the spaces publicly accessible?

### Boundary treatments

What materials are used to delineate boundaries? Is there a clear style, typology or design applied to these?

END OF SECTION

## BIRMINGHAM'S HISTORIC ASSETS

### CITY NOTE ID-2: Historic Significance

The historical significance of an asset is likely to have an important influence on any development proposals.

Working with the City's Conservation Officers, developers must have a clear understanding of an asset's significance in order to establish the parameters of possible change, and the subsequent nature of conservation that can and/or should take place. This judgement should then be the starting point for the design of any development proposal.

Significance is gauged on one, or more, of four values:

**Evidential value** - the degree of fabric that has survived. This does not only signify completeness of original materials and finishes, but the survival of important features or sound phases of development. The earlier, rarer and completer the fabric the greater this value contributes to significance.

**Historic value** - relates to events, people, organisations and significant moments in local or national history. The more important the historical link the greater this value contributes to significance.

**Aesthetic value** - the visual and architectural contribution the asset makes to the environment. The more a design relates to an architectural movement, speculative plan or vernacular style the greater this value contributes to significance.

**Communal value** - buildings and places can be considered to have cultural heritage if it has important meaning to a large body of the community. The more important a building is to a group, community, neighbourhood or fraternity the greater this value contributes to significance.

Whilst the four values above will be constant in informing significance, different heritage assets will have different significances. There are no fixed methods of appraising significance and buildings, places and objects may all have similar interests attached to them.

### CITY NOTE ID-3: Significance of Setting

Beyond the significance of the asset itself, consideration must also be given to its 'setting' and the potential impact new development may have on it.

'Setting' relates to the surroundings in which a place is experienced, its local context and relationships to the adjacent landscape.

An asset's setting may be small and very intimate or may extend to some considerable distance. The setting of a modest house may only encompass its section of the street; whereas a church spire will command a far greater setting, and wider consideration. Equally the scale and/or siting of a development may have wide reaching impacts beyond its immediate hinterland. In these scenarios, wider assessment of setting may be required.

Appraising the significance of a setting is not simply a consideration of any two objects that have inter-visibility, but rather gauging an understanding of the relationship between the historic asset and its setting; and what of this is most important to it.

*In helping to understand the significance of setting, it may be appropriate to consider if the setting has evolved over time? Has the landscape of the heritage asset become more urbanised? What is the character of the setting? How do buildings, structures and spaces help in understanding the heritage asset?*

Appropriately located and designed, new development can be absorbed into a setting resulting in a neutral impact on the asset. Conversely, without appropriate understanding of its significance, irreversible harm could be caused.

Architects must engage with the Conservation Officers at the earliest stage of the design process to agree the significance of the setting and the role the development site has within it. Historic England's guidance on the subject should also be used to aid this process:

*The Setting of Heritage Assets: Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning – Note 3 (Historic England 2015)*  
<https://content.historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/gpa3-setting-of-heritage-assets/gpa3.pdf/>

Setting impact should form an intrinsic element of a character assessment when an historic asset lies within close proximity of the development site, or the scale of development is such, that long distance impacts on a setting may need to be considered.

**END OF SECTION**

## HISTORIC DESIGNATIONS

### Listed Buildings

A building or structure identified by Historic England as demonstrating national significance to the historical, social, cultural, industrial, economic and/or political development of England.

Buildings are classified in grades, relative to their significance: grade II (nationally important and of special interest); grade II\* (particularly important and of more than special interest); and grade I (of exceptional interest).

Buildings are listed in their entirety. Any object or structure fixed to a listed building is treated as part of the listed building. As are structures within the curtilage present before 1 July 1948.

### Scheduled Ancient Monuments

An historic building, structure or site scheduled by the Secretary of state for Culture, Media and Sport, due to its national archaeological significance.

Monuments are scheduled based on their national importance, the characteristics of which can relate to: Period, Rarity, Documentation/Finds, Group value, Survival/condition, Fragility / vulnerability, Diversity and Potential.

### Registered Parks and Gardens

Registered parks and gardens are essentially historic landscape assets comprising the grounds of private houses, public parks and cemeteries.

Assets are designated by Historic England ('register of historic parks and gardens of special historic interest in England'), who apply a similar grading system to listed buildings, grades I, II \* or II.

Across Birmingham lie a number of listed buildings, Registered Parks and Gardens and Scheduled Ancient Monuments. These are mapped, with descriptions by Historic England and can be viewed at: <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/map-search?clearresults=True>

### Conservation Areas

Townscape and/or landscape designated by the Local Planning Authority, containing a group of assets of special architectural or historic interest, worthy of preservation and enhancement.

*Article 4 Direction* – enhances protection of the conservation area by removing elements of permitted development, such as being able to replace windows or re-



roofing a property. It is important to check whether your property is covered by an Article 4 Direction before undertaking any works to your building.

Numerous conservation areas have been designated across Birmingham, full details and locations of which can be viewed at:

[www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/20055/conservation\\_areas/13/birminghams\\_conservation\\_areas](http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/20055/conservation_areas/13/birminghams_conservation_areas)

*Local / non-designated heritage assets*

Local buildings and structures, not considered to have national historic significance, but have local significance that contributes to the character of the local area. Whilst not subject to the same protection as listed buildings, their designation is a material consideration in the planning process.

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