Draft Birmingham Design Guide

Overview of the document structure

November 2020

Birmingham City Council

Draft Birmingham Design Guide Overview of the document structure

The Design Guide is comprised of a suite of documents, providing guidance on all elements of development.

The suite is made up of a tier of 6 documents, with an overarching Design Principles Document and 5 supporting City Manuals. These collectively form the Birmingham Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).

The Design Guide Principles Document
The Design Guide Principles Document is structured around 5 themes, under which are a number of Design Principles development must effectively address and respond to.

These 5 themes are:

- The Birmingham ID
- Streets and spaces
- Landscape and green infrastructure
- Healthy living and working places
- Efficient and future-ready

The Design Guide City Manuals
The Design Guide 5 City Manuals provide further guidance on how to fulfil the requirements of the design principles. There is a City Manual for each theme, with references in the design principles to which element (City Note) of the City Manual users should refer to.

The 5 City Manuals:

- The Birmingham ID City Manual
- Streets and Spaces City Manual
- Landscape and Green Infrastructure City Manual
- Healthy Living and Working Places City Manual
- Efficient and Future-ready City Manual

Birmingham Design Guide
Principles Document

The Birmingham Design Guide Principles Document

Themes

The Birmingham ID	Streets and Spaces	Landscape and Green Infrastructure	Healthy Living and Working Places	Efficient and Future-Ready

Further guidance on how to fulfill the design principles

City Manuals

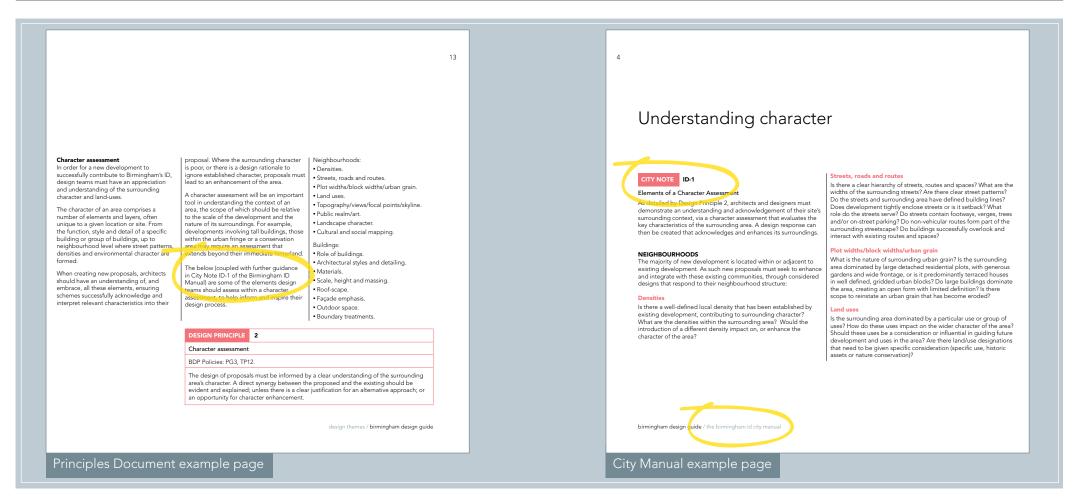| The Birmingham ID City Manual	Streets and Spaces City Manual	Landscape and Green Infrastructure City Manual	Healthy Living and Working Places City Manual	Efficient and Future-Ready City Manual

Draft Birmingham Design Guide An example of how a Design Principle and City Manual link

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Character assessment

In order for a new development to successfully contribute to Birmingham's ID, design teams must have an appreciation and understanding of the surrounding character and land-uses.

The character of an area comprises a number of elements and layers, often unique to a given location or site. From the function, style and detail of a specific building or group of buildings, up to neighbourhood level where street patterns, densities and environmental character are formed.

When creating new proposals, architects should have an understanding of, and embrace, all these elements, ensuring schemes successfully acknowledge and interpret relevant characteristics into their proposal. Where the surrounding character is poor, or there is a design rationale to ignore established character, proposals must lead to an enhancement of the area.

A character assessment will be an important tool in understanding the context of an area, the scope of which should be relative to the scale of the development and the nature of its surroundings. For example, developments involving tall buildings, those within the urban fringe or a conservation area may require an assessment that extends beyond their immediate hinterland.

The below (coupled with further guidance in City Note ID-1 of the Birmingham ID Manual) are some of the elements design teams should assess within a character assessment, to help inform and inspire their design process.

Neighbourhoods:
• Densities.
• Streets, roads and routes.
• Plot widths/block widths/urban grain.
• Land uses.
• Topography/views/focal points/skyline.
• Public realm/art.
• Landscape character.
• Cultural and social mapping.

Buildings:
• Role of buildings.
• Architectural styles and detailing.
• Materials.
• Scale, height and massing.
• Roof-scape.
• Façade emphasis.
• Outdoor space.
• Boundary treatments.

DESIGN PRINCIPLE	2
Character assessment	
BDP Policies: PG3, TP12.	
The design of proposals must be informed by a clear understanding of the surrounding area's character. A direct synergy between the proposed and the existing should be evident and explained; unless there is a clear justification for an alternative approach; or an opportunity for character enhancement.	

Principles Document example page

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)?

City Manual example page

Design Principle 2 (in the Design Principles Document) relates to the use of character assessments to gain an understanding of the surrounding area.

As highlighted, the design principle makes reference to 'City Note ID-1 in the Birmingham ID City Manual' for more guidance on undertaking an assessment.

When submitting a planning application, proposals must demonstrate they have undertaken a character assessment (informed by the guidance in City Note ID-1) as part of their design process, to align with Design Principle 2.

Further queries
Please email queries to: DesignGuide@birmingham.gov.uk

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