

People and Places

An Urban Design Guide for Moray



URBAN DESIGN



the moray council



DECEMBER 2010

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An Urban Design Guide for Moray



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Foreword

As Chair of the Moray Council Planning and Regulatory Services Committee I welcome the publication of this Guidance. This Guidance is one of several being prepared in support of the Moray Local Plan with the aim of creating attractive new urban areas to complement the high quality rural environment that we enjoy in Moray. *

Urban design has a huge impact upon our quality of life, affecting where we live, where we work and where we socialise. Creating successful places in Moray will require professionals involved in design issues to work more closely together to meet the aspirations of the Scottish Government, which has produced policy guidance encouraging all involved to work together to achieve better urban design solutions and avoid bland and uninteresting developments lacking in any distinct character. In this context, 'urban' relates to the towns and villages as identified in the Moray Local Plan 2008. Separate 'Housing in the Countryside' guidance applies outwith the towns and villages. It does not apply within the Cairngorms National Park Area.

This Guidance sets out the general principles for urban design in Moray which will encourage the design of attractive, lively and well connected places that we can be proud of in the future.



Cllr Stewart Cree
Chair of the Planning and Regulatory Services Committee

* The document should be read in conjunction with other Supplementary Planning Guidelines prepared by the Council

Trees and Development: provides guidance on the retention and protection of trees on development sites.

Developer Requirements for Housing: advises on the relevant Local Plan policies that will require to be met, including layout and design; transport; play areas; energy efficiency/reduction; drainage; waste.





1. Introduction

The Scottish Government has made a clear commitment to raising the standards of urban design. The Government publications “Designing Places” and “Designing Streets” set out a national framework for professions to work together to deliver better standards of urban design.

“Designing Places” and “Designing Streets” put well designed streets back at the heart of sustainable communities in Scotland. The principal focus is no longer on the movement function of streets, which has led to the dominance of the motor vehicle in recent developments. Good urban design requires design to be at the heart of the development process, involving communities and professions working together to achieve a quality outcome. Urban design is about making connections between people and places, between buildings and streets, between public and private spaces and between the built and natural environments.

This Guide has been produced as a response to the gradual erosion of character and identity in some of Moray’s settlements, notably on Greenfield sites at the edge of larger towns. These modern developments often lack character and identity and appear to be dominated by the needs of the car, are poorly connected and have poor open spaces.

The overall aim of this Guide is to encourage good design principles to ensure that new developments are successful places to live, work and relax. Good design from the outset can avoid problems in the longer term such as poorly maintained spaces, isolated communities and social problems. Good design adds value to a development, creating a place that is attractive, safe and easy to move around. The Guide aims to reduce reliance upon the car and reinforce the role of our streets as a key way of walking and cycling and therefore creating a sense of place and allowing for much more social interaction to take place.

The benefits of good urban design are;

- Provides a better place for everybody who lives, works or visits our urban areas
- Makes urban areas more competitive and attractive for inward investment
- Retains the economic value of property and communities
- Creates high quality living spaces which are attractive, safe and well connected
- Places are distinctive with their own identity
- Places are safer with lower crime rates and fewer social problems
- People enjoy a healthier lifestyle with more opportunities for walking and cycling as an alternative to the car
- People have better access to public transport



"Designing Places" emphasises the need for new developments to be successful places and not "just another development", which fails to reflect the characteristics of the site and surrounding area. Creating a sense of place involves ensuring that the development is responsive to and integrates into the surrounding environment. Every town and village has a series of elements, which contribute to its own identity and these will be reflected in the land uses, building styles and materials. Many of our recent developments fail to reflect these local elements resulting in a growing uniformity in housing layouts, with a number of common characteristics.

- Housing layouts have become dominated by dependence upon the car resulting in the streetscape becoming overwhelmed by car parking.
- Large block sizes with a series of cul de sacs .
- The "backs" of new developments have often been turned to main routes reducing activity and surveillance of streets.
- Open spaces are not fit for purpose, fail to contribute and connect to green corridors and serve little purpose, becoming a maintenance problem in the longer term.
- Boundary treatments are often poorly landscaped areas dominated by high wooden fencing.
- Internal road layouts can be confusing and difficult for people to find their way around.
- Developments have poor connections internally and externally.
- House styles can be bland and repetitive.
- There is an unclear definition between private and public spaces.

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To overcome these problems, there are a number of key principles in the design process, which should be followed to ensure that places are distinctive and have their own recognisable qualities. The Council will expect to see evidence of these steps set out in Design Statements where these are required.

The guidance is aimed primarily at larger housing developments but many of these principles can be applied to all types and sizes of development. The Guidance supports and expands upon the Local Plan policies and the Developer Requirements Supplementary Planning Guidance. Some of the key development sites identified in the Local Plan will also be the subject of development briefs, which will contain greater detail on site specific design issues. When approved the Guidance will become a material consideration and be used in determining planning applications.

This Guide is split into 3 main sections setting out key principles which should be applied to the design process under the headings, Creating Places with Character and Identity, Connecting Places and Creating Safe and Pleasant Places.

This Guidance aims to interpret national policy and guidance on urban design into a Moray context.

2. Creating Places with Character and Identity

Aim:

Key Principles:

- Buildings should be arranged in perimeter block format with private backs and public fronts.
- Buildings must front onto the street and be designed to ensure active frontages onto the street.
- Public and private spaces must be clearly defined.
- Density should be appropriate to the site's context and its level of accessibility to public transport, facilities, shops and employment opportunities.
- New development must reflect an understanding of the context of the surrounding built and natural environment.
- Buildings along prominent streets, key frontages and corners must reinforce the character and identity of a place.
- Development proposals must incorporate a range of building sizes and types appropriate to the site.

People find their way around urban areas using a series of landmarks, roads and other markers and should be able to distinguish easily between different parts of each town. Each part of a town should be recognised through its distinct characteristics, landmarks, views and activities. People should also easily understand what is public and private space and feel safe as they understand where they are and where they are going.

This is known as creating a “legible” development. Historically in Moray, many towns and villages have developed as either a grid pattern such as Hopeman, or as a series of narrow lanes with small stone cottages such as in Seatown, Cullen. These characteristics have created easily recognisable urban forms. A sense of identity helps people belong to an area. Urban spaces that provide an identifiable and memorable character have a strong sense of place.



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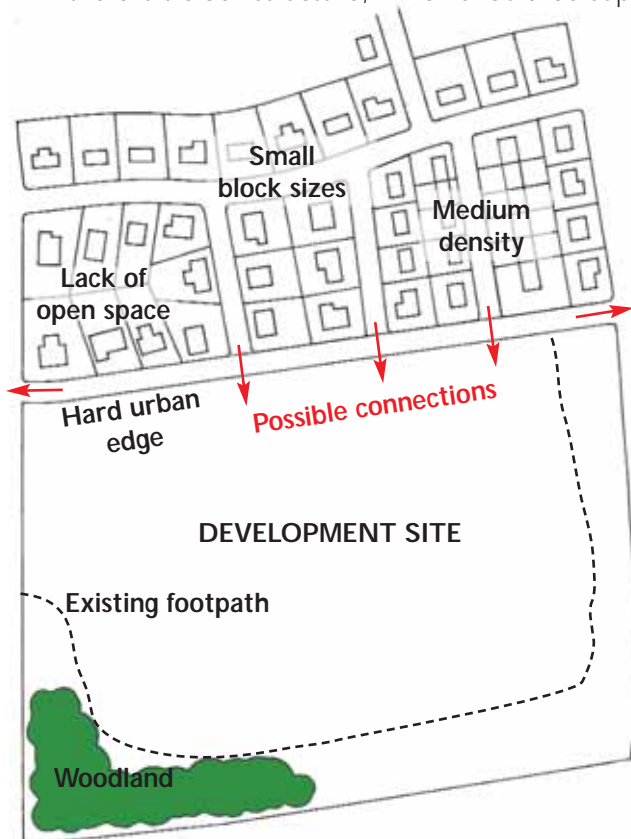
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Much of the modern development within our urban areas has resulted from little or no analysis of how a development relates to activities on adjacent sites and the surrounding area. The first stage in the design process is therefore to carry out a “legibility analysis” of the development site. This analysis will demonstrate a thorough understanding of a development site. The key existing characteristics of the site should be identified, including:-

- existing access connections to and around the site
- pedestrian and vehicle movements in and around the site
- landscape features
- topography
- views in and out of the site
- neighbouring land uses
- materials used in the surrounding area- walls, roofs, windows, street furniture, street surfacing.
- the local street pattern
- housing density
- networks of open spaces in and around the site

Combining the new and existing elements

The features identified in the legibility analysis should be fixed and integrated into the new development. Key desirable connections (school, open spaces, public transport etc) should be identified and reflected in the draft block structure, which should be superimposed onto the site layout.



Legibility analysis of development site



Layout combining new and existing elements

Block sizes

Getting the block size correct is a key consideration in the design process. Block sizes should reflect the surrounding character. Large block sizes are a common failing in modern developments resulting in a meandering road layout with a series of cul de sacs leading from it. A draft block structure should be overlaid onto the results of the legibility analysis.



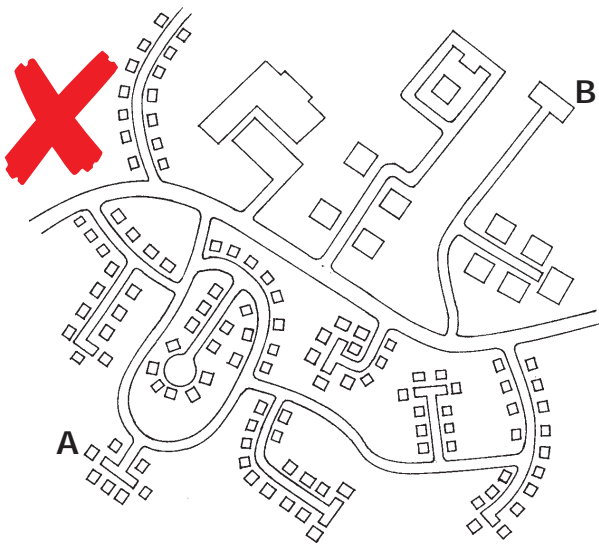
Example of small well connected blocks

Small block sizes offer more choice of routes than large blocks and are considered to be more “permeable”. Small block sizes are easier to find your way around and offer better opportunities for walking and cycling. A variation in the block size within a place can also add variety, interest and character.



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Large block sizes and cul de sacs offer fewer choices of routes from A to B.



Small block sizes offer more routes options from A to B.

Diversity within a block can be added by differing house styles, plot widths and architectural details. The size of the block has to be adjusted to take account of:-

- the proposed uses and building types
- key connections required
- viewpoints
- corner treatments

Perimeter Blocks

Blocks must be arranged to face outwards onto the street and make a clear distinction between public fronts and private backs. Buildings fronting onto streets, squares and parks present their public face and create activity, vitality and security. Perimeter blocks are proven to be an effective structure for residential areas. They also offer opportunities for private, enclosed gardens. Where this rule is not followed, buildings often expose blank sides, car parking areas and rear servicing to the street, restricting activity and natural surveillance.

Continuous building lines along a block edge are successful at providing good enclosure to a street or square and generating an active frontage with frequent windows and doors. Active frontages encourage street activity and increase security. The primary means of access for all dwellings should be from the street. Living rooms and kitchens provide the most active natural forms of surveillance. Bathrooms, bin stores and garages are the least active. No blank facades should face out onto public space. Main entrances should open onto the streets that they front.

Perimeter block layout with central open space

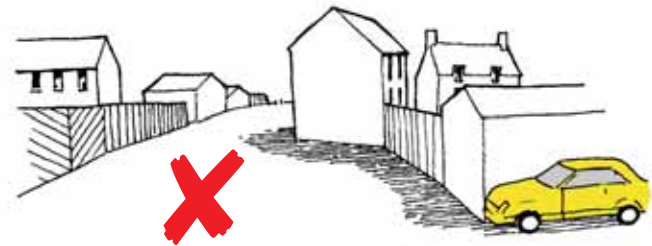


Fronts and Backs

Streets should be designed with the basic principle of public fronts and private backs. Back gardens should be private and adjoin other back gardens or a secure communal space. However, backing onto public open space should be avoided. Front doors should open onto front gardens, or small areas in front of the property. In commercial developments, service areas should be located to the rear with active frontages and sides to the buildings.



A street with an active frontage and a clear public front



A street with blank facades, presenting its back to the street

Density

The Moray Local Plan identifies indicative capacities for designated housing sites. For other sites the appropriate density will be determined by taking account of a number of criteria including landscaping, access, neighbouring density levels, noise, flooding etc.

Mixed Uses

Larger residential areas should incorporate a range of non residential uses, such as shops, schools, employment and community facilities. The location of these within predominantly residential areas will reduce the need to travel, and will create activity and the opportunity for social interaction. Community facilities should be sited at locations, which are accessible by a choice of transport modes.



Retention of historic building acts as a sequence marker

Sequence markers

Where required, sequence markers can be added to the design to assist with orientation around an area. Sequence markers are required along longer stretches of paths or roads to remind people where they are and provide a sense of getting somewhere. A sequence marker can be added in a variety of forms including a different house style, landscape feature or street furniture. These can be sited at junctions to become landmarks within a formal grid structure. However, on curved streets, they should be sited to be visible from a distance and could project up, down or forward, relative to the building line.



Natural Stone walling used as a sequence marker and adds to the identity of this development

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House Designs

Development proposals should include a mix of housing types and sizes that will contribute towards the quality of the place. Careful attention should be paid to the building design, finishes and materials. Building scale, positioning of doors, windows, and materials are all important contributors to the overall design of a place. The aim should be to create an interesting streetscape with different house styles sharing an overall unity in terms of design which integrates with the surrounding area.

Corners

Where a building is on a corner, it must “turn” the corner by providing an active frontage on both streets. Corner sites are visually prominent, have two frontages and need to face both ways. They can be key buildings, which enhance legibility and visual surveillance of public areas.

Gateway features

Gateway features must be included at all main entrances into a new development. These should add to the character and identity of a place. Gateway features will normally include soft landscaping, street furniture, public art features and well designed and positioned buildings to provide a sense of arrival. Gateway features must also be incorporated into new roundabouts leading into places to avoid featureless roundabouts along key transport routes.



3. Making the Connections

Aim: To promote development that is integrated and connected with its surrounding environment and offers a variety of modes of travel.

Key Principles:

- Development must be based on a permeable movement framework, which accommodates desire lines and is connected with adjacent street networks and allows for future connections.
- Parking provision must ensure that the car does not dominate the street.
- A hierarchy of street types should be established, with each street type classified according to its character and capacity
- Places must promote the concept of a “walkable neighbourhood.”
- Places must be designed to accommodate public transport provision.

Route Connections

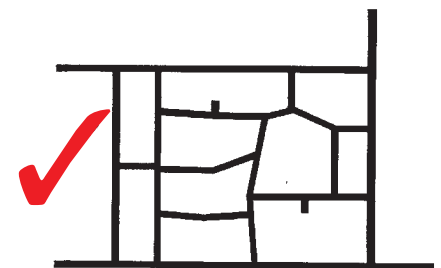
Successful places depend upon good connections to and within the place, which will influence people’s movement patterns. Making these connections starts to change the function of the street, generating social encounters and adding to a sense of community. A well connected place is considered to be “permeable”, allowing a range of potential connecting routes.

Connected streets provide people with a choice of routes to local amenities. Walkable neighbourhoods have a range of facilities within 5 minutes (up to about 400m) walking distance of residential areas. Streets and paths that connect together as part of a network, rather than ending in cul de sacs help people to move around much more easily. This also integrates communities and reduces isolation of some parts of the community.

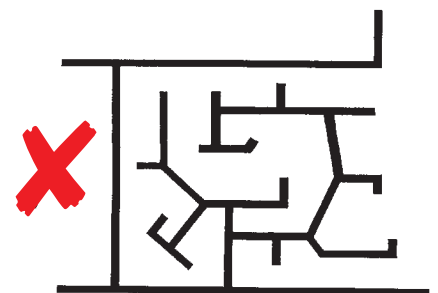
The benefits of connected street patterns are:-

- Movement is much easier and spreads traffic, reducing congestion.
- More activity to the street frontage and greater surveillance and security.
- Promotes walking and cycling as an alternative mode of transport and encourages “walkable heighbourhoods.”
- Helps encourage integration and connection of communities

Planning the connections correctly will provide the maximum choice of routes for movements that will be generated and will provide connections to schools, open spaces and other facilities. An analysis is required of existing movement patterns in and around the site and a study of the likely desired movements that people will want to make to ensure that new connections integrate with the existing ones. Development proposals should provide for a range of transport modes, making it more attractive to walk or cycle as it is to take the car. Streets which could be used by public



A well connected permeable street pattern



A poorly connected street pattern dominated by cul de sacs

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transport should be identified at an early stage so they can be designed to be as direct as possible. The connections should reflect the surrounding street pattern where appropriate and aim to spread traffic throughout the site and surroundings, reducing congestion. Pedestrians and cyclists can be accommodated through a combination of on street and off street provision.

Places should be designed as walkable neighbourhoods with access to local facilities and services within a 5-10 minute walk. This supports the wider aim of encouraging the creation of mixed use communities with well connected street patterns and local facilities within walking distance, reducing dependence upon the car.

Streets should also be designed to reflect the needs of emergency and servicing vehicles.

Car parking

Car parking can dominate the streetscape unless it is carefully designed. The street must be capable of accommodating parked vehicles without detracting from the character of the place. Parking and turning space also needs to be considered for bicycles, public transport and service vehicles. The level and location of car parking provision can influence how people travel. Parking should be conveniently located and overlooked by properties. Parking within the front curtilage should be avoided as it breaks up the building frontage and leads to a visual dominance of parked cars, restricts overlooking of the street and minimises garden space.

Most residential car parking must be provided to the side or behind the building line, in areas which allow for active surveillance. Car parking to the side of properties is preferred, but some styles of development e.g. flats may be suited to rear or courtyard parking.

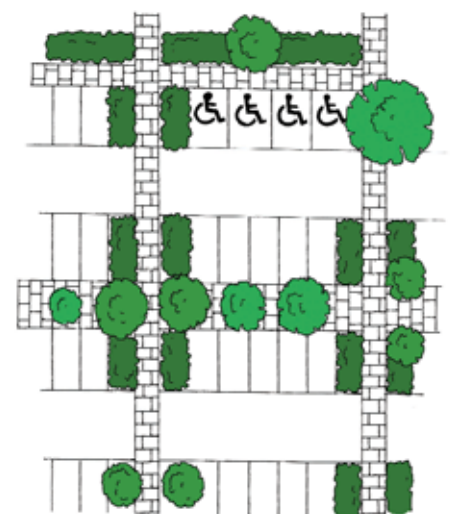
Street frontages should not be dominated by garage doors, which should be in line with or set back from the house front.

On-street parking using discrete bays broken up by soft landscaping, kerb features or street furniture softens the impact of communal parking areas. Communal car parking to the rear of flatted developments reduces the impact of the car and allows for a softer, landscaped frontage to the building.

In commercial developments, which involve significant areas of car parking, the impact should be reduced by locating parking to the side or rear. Paved surfaces should be kept to a minimum and parking bays broken up into small separated clusters.



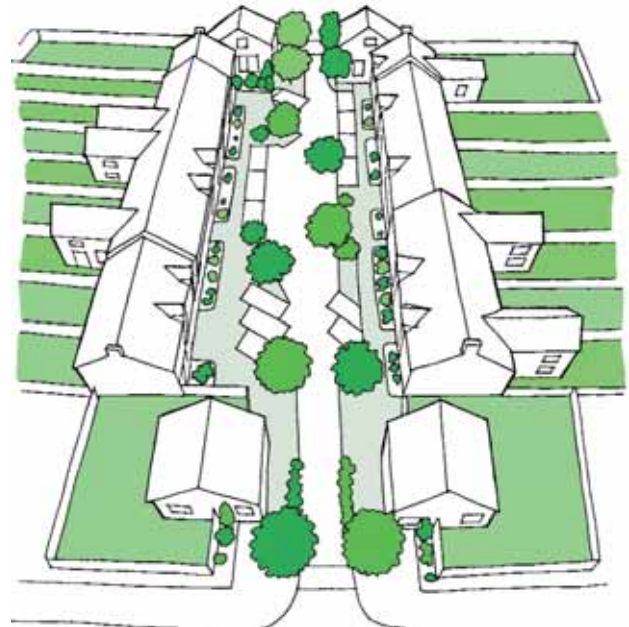
Car parking provided to the rear of property reduces the level of parking on the street



Parking bays should be broken up with soft landscaping

Homezones

Home zones are residential areas which have been designed to ensure that the quality of life in the residential area takes precedence over ease of vehicle movement. Homezones are most appropriate for streets with a low volume of vehicular movements. Home zones will usually involve narrow shared surfaces with built in elements (raised tables/chicanes) combined with features such as trees, planters and street furniture to limit traffic speeds through design. In designing shared surface streets, the design solution must ensure that the street will be wide enough to accommodate servicing and emergency vehicles.



Example of a Homezone layout

Homezones are often constructed using pavements or coloured/textured asphalt rather than traditional black asphalt. This helps to highlight the different nature of the "street".



Canal Bank, Lossiemouth is a well designed Homezone, although the location and site conditions resulted in a cul de sac layout. Clear signage, a change in surface materials and segregated parking identify the area as a shared surface Homezone.

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Homezones can form part of a well connected network of public shared spaces which encourage walking, cycling and social interaction. Home zones should conform with the following key principles:-

- Access points into Homezones must be clearly defined to allow all users to understand the change in street layout and function, which requires different behaviour. Access point design is likely to include design features such as planting, street narrowing, surface level and material changes.
- Streets within the Homezone must be capable of allowing two way traffic movements. One way systems will not be acceptable.
- Short forward visibility standards must be applied to influence driver behaviour and encourage low vehicle speeds. This can be achieved with varied deflections in the street and the careful positioning of trees, planters, buildings, lighting columns etc.
- On street parking should be designed to minimise the impact upon the streetscene, influence traffic movement and speed. Soft and hard landscaping and street furniture should be used to define parking areas.
- Paving materials and colours should be varied to distinguish between the preferred use of a particular part of a shared surface and to reinforce the distinctiveness and identity of public spaces. Developers are advised to discuss materials/colours with the Planning Authority at pre-application stage.

Cul de sacs

Cul de Sacs have become a common feature in modern housing developments. Although they offer some advantages in terms of having no through traffic and a perception of being quiet and safe, they put pressure on the local network of streets and can be more susceptible to crime than more traditional layouts. Cul de sacs are not well connected and can add to the fragmentation and isolation of some places. However, there may be instances where cul de sacs are required because of topography or other site constraints. In these cases through routes for cyclists and walkers should be provided and these should be well overlooked with active frontages. There may be opportunities to introduce “non standard” materials and specifications in short sections of cul de sacs, which would remain in private ownership and remain the responsibility of individual householders. This would help achieve a finer “grain” within developments, but should be discussed with the Council’s Transportation Service at an early stage.



4. Creating Safe and Pleasant Places

Aim: To promote places that are responsive to the natural environment and offer safe, quality recreational opportunities.

Key Principles:

- Proposals must use land efficiently and avoid creating layouts which result in left over space.
- New development must incorporate and respond to important natural features.
- New development must include a network of open spaces and connect with existing and surrounding green networks.
- Open spaces must be fit for purpose and linked together by footpaths and cycle paths.
- Proposals must include provision for public art.
- Open spaces, footpaths and parking areas should be overlooked by buildings.

Open Space Provision

Well designed open spaces should be an integral part of a development and provide a focal point for the local community. Open spaces allow for informal recreation opportunities and break up the built environment. Open Spaces should aim to add to existing features in and around the site to create a network of green corridors linked together by footpaths and cycle paths to reduce reliance on the car. Existing natural features on the site should be identified as part of the early appraisal process and integrated into the design.

Developments should incorporate a variety of open spaces to provide for a range of uses from walking, kick about areas and amenity provision. Green networks are important for connectivity, visual amenity and for encouraging biodiversity.

To ensure they are “fit for purpose”, open spaces should be;-

- overlooked by buildings with active frontages
- in the right place
- multi functional
- readily accessible
- safe, inclusive and welcoming
- well maintained
- performing an identified function.
- Linked by foot/ cycle paths to the rest of the place and linked to public transport connections.
- Connected into other open spaces in adjacent areas to form green corridors



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Left over areas should not be used as open space provision as these often lead to problems of maintenance. Details of how spaces will be maintained should be provided to the Council.

New planting should be integrated into street designs wherever possible. Tree and shrub planting in front gardens and communal parking areas helps to break up the built environment and softens the streetscape. Care must be taken in the selection of tree species to avoid future maintenance problems in terms of the impact on buildings, footway and servicing.



Parking areas broken up with landscaping

Boundary treatments should enhance and define open spaces. High wooden fencing along boundaries will not be acceptable unless accompanied by soft landscaping.

Crime Prevention

Blank facades, remote footpaths, poor lighting and areas which cannot be observed all contribute to perceptions of poor security. Well designed places should take account of crime prevention measures. Buildings should be orientated to ensure that public open spaces, car parking areas and footpaths are all overlooked to improve security. Active building frontages generate movement and help to increase security.

Lighting can help reduce the incidence of crime, add vitality to the area, enhance its attractiveness and sense of place.

Footpaths should have an open aspect, be well lit, with good surveillance allowing pedestrians to see the full length of the path. Pedestrians should not have to negotiate enclosed, poorly lit paths or negotiate blind corners or recesses.

Public art

Public art can make a major contribution towards creating a sense of character and identity in a place. Public art must be integrated into the design from the outset and can be provided in a wide range of imaginative ways including street furniture, paving art and events. Developers should commission artists at an early stage of the design process to integrate art into the development.

Reducing street clutter

Street furniture, signs, bins, bollards, lighting and other items which tend to accumulate on a footway can clutter the streetscape and be visually intrusive. Signage must be kept to a minimum and be well located.

Checklist

The following checklist should be used as a prompt to ensure the key principles of this guide have been incorporated into development proposals.

Creating Places

Does the design;-

- Reflect an analysis of existing site features
- Integrate with the surrounding street pattern, building types, scale and massing and materials
- identify an appropriate block size
- ensure that buildings offer a public front and private back
- ensure that there are active frontages on buildings
- ensure that corner buildings and other key buildings are easily identifiable
- include sequence markers to navigate around the streets
- include gateway features

2. Connecting Places

Does the design

- create a well connected place
- identify the existing and proposed future connections
- make walking, cycling and public transport as attractive as using the car
- ensure that car parking is located sensitively to avoid cars dominating the streetscape
- ensure access for all

3. Creating Safe and Pleasant Places

Does the design

- Include open spaces that are fit for purpose which contribute to green corridors.
- Ensure open spaces, footpaths and communal car parking areas are all overlooked by buildings with active frontages.
- Integrate planting proposals to soften the urban environment.
- Ensure that boundary treatments are softened with landscaping and avoid stark high wooden fencing.
- Ensure that streets, open spaces, footpaths/ cycleways are open and well lit, and not enclosed or involving blind corners.
- Incorporate public art into the development
- Incorporate street furniture, signage etc

Developers are encouraged to contact the Council as early as possible in the design process to discuss their proposals.



Design Statements

A design statement is a written statement about the design principles and concepts applied to the development and which;-

- explains the policy or approach adopted and how policies relating to design have been taken into account.
- describes the steps taken to appraise the context of the development and how that context has been taken into account.
- states what consultation has been undertaken on design issues and what account has been taken of the outcome of any such consultation

Design and Access Statements are required for national and major planning applications, although this is not required for planning permission in principle. Design Statements are also required for local developments situated within;-

- world heritage sites
- conservation areas
- historic gardens and designed landscapes
- national scenic areas
- scheduled ancient monuments
- curtilage of an A listed building

except where the development comprises the alteration or extension of an existing building.

In preparing a statement, applicants should consider the guidance in PAN68: Design Statements. A Design and Access Statement template is available online as part of the Councils pre-application guidance (see below).

The statement must also explain how access provision both to and through the site has been made and how features, which ensure access to the development for disabled people will be maintained.

Further Information/Contacts

Moray Local Plan 2008

http://www.moray.gov.uk/moray_standard/page_57742.html

Designing Places

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Built-Environment/planning/National-Planning-Policy/Designing>

Designing Streets

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/03/22120652/0>

Planning Advice Note 68 Design Statements

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2003/08/18013/25389>

Moray Council Pre-Application Guidance

http://www.moray.gov.uk/moray_standard/page_41669.html

Moray Council Supplementary Planning Guidance

http://www.moray.gov.uk/moray_standard/page_1650.html

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