

# Chief Planning Officer's Advice Note

Cornwall Council Interim Planning Guidance:

## Good Design in Cornwall

**This is one of a series of notes issued by the Chief Planning Officer to guide greater consistency when making planning decisions. These notes may be updated from time-to-time in response to changing circumstances.**

**It provides guidance to help reach a decision only and should not be used as a reason for refusal. The note cannot be used as a substitute for the policies of the Adopted Local Plan.**

The NPPF was revised in 2021 to increase the emphasis on achieving good design and create beautiful places. This includes a new national Design Guide and Model Design Code.

Cornwall Council wants to improve the places where people live, work and use for recreation. Safe and enjoyable places, particularly those that include access to nature, can help everyone to be active, to relax, to engage with each other, improve wellbeing and reduce social isolation. We expect all new development proposals to contribute to this aim through high quality design.

The [Cornwall Design Guide](#) was adopted in December 2021 and aims to support the Cornwall Local Plan. It provides a guide to delivering high quality places to live for Cornwall. The document takes a new approach for design guidance in Cornwall, describing the desired outcomes, including those previously included in the Streetscape Design Guide. It follows the same formatting as the national Design Guide by using ten characteristics of good design and links to the new National Model Design Code. In due course design codes will be advanced by Cornwall Council and Neighbourhood Plan groups.

The Council wishes to work with applicants to achieve the best outcomes by encouraging innovation in sustainable building construction and seeking good design solutions, but we do not wish to impose an artificial vernacular or aesthetic taste. There is evidence that well designed places not only benefit our quality of life but also make an improvement to the quality of places and their financial value<sup>1</sup> whether meeting either open market or an affordable housing need. From our experience, we achieve good design when we work together at an early stage as part of the pre-application stage of the planning process. This should include engagement with the community and the planners. Applicants are urged to discuss schemes with their neighbours and consider the most appropriate community engagement methods to involve people in the design of the scheme.

The Local Plan sets out strategic policies that will be used to judge the quality of design, including:

- Policy 2(1) Spatial Strategy – ‘Respecting and enhancing quality of place’,
- Policy 12 (Design),
- Policy 13 (Development Standards),
- Policy 16 (Health and Well Being), and
- Policy 25 (Green Infrastructure).

In our experience, there are at least ten practical considerations that provide a good starting point for delivering good development in Cornwall, which are set out below. All development proposals should take these into account, no matter how modest, and larger schemes will invariably need to go further. Fundamentally all new development in Cornwall should feel Cornish and be shaped by the site's history, culture, landscape and, where relevant, relationship to the sea. Development should not be stuck in the past or replicate nearby poor-quality development, it should respond creatively and positively to its surroundings, providing healthy places for people and space for nature.

<sup>1</sup> Development: The Value of Place making, Savills October 2016

This note should not be used too prescriptively, it is not a toolkit, it is a broad guide that should be read in conjunction with:

- **The Cornwall Design Guide** (CDG).
- **Building for a Healthy Life** (BfL) – updated in 2020 with an increased emphasis on health is a simple tool which contains twelve headline challenges under three key themes ‘Integrated Neighbourhoods’, ‘Distinctive Places’ and ‘Streets for All’ that are a useful starting point to the design process.
- **Building with Nature** (BwN), which sets out a measurable approach to demonstrating how good green infrastructure can be demonstrated for Water, Wildlife and Wellbeing in all development.
- **Any emerging and adopted design codes** at Cornwall or Parish level

### Ten practical considerations for good development in Cornwall

These ten considerations will be our starting point for considering smaller proposals and do not cover everything. The Design Guide, Building for a Healthy Life and Building with Nature will also be used for larger proposals. Proposals should consider:

#### 1. **Context: Does the proposal suit its context?**

We expect development to demonstrate a clear understanding of how it responds positively to the site and its surroundings, including how it works with the landscape, nature and nearby development.

Further advice: Cornwall Design Guide chapter 1 and appendix 1.

#### 2. **Identity and built form: Does the proposal have a sense of place and would it add to local distinctiveness?**

We believe new development should have a distinctive character and should not perpetuate low quality design. It should be locally distinctive, embedding features of the landscape, using the existing topography and natural local materials such as granite, quarried stone or slate. Where other materials are to be used, they should fit with the palate of locally available materials in form, texture and colour. The innovative use of sustainable materials can be inspiring and is encouraged.

Further advice: Cornwall Design Guide chapters 2 and 3 and BfL challenges: 5 Making the most of what’s there, 6 a memorable character, 7 well defined streets and spaces and 8 easy to find your way around.

#### 3. **Movement: Does the proposal encourage healthy movement and lifestyles?**

We expect development to create and exploit opportunities to prioritise active travel create healthier streets, this involves making connections to nearby shops, services, green space and countryside by providing safe and legible footpaths, cycle routes and green corridors. Creating safe and attractive environments that can be shared by people and slow-moving traffic (no more than 20mph), make new developments feel more pleasant places to be.

Further advice Cornwall Design Guide chapters 5, 6, 7 and BfL challenges: 1 natural connections, 2 walking, cycling & public transport 3 facilities and services, 8 easy to find your way around, 9 healthy streets. Building with Nature.

4. **Are streets healthy, low speed and well designed with integrated cycle and car parking?**

Creating safe and attractive environments that can be shared by people and slow-moving traffic (no more than 20mph), make new developments feel more pleasant places to be. Development should be planned for a 20mph design speed or less. Parking on streets and roads can work best when using landscaping (street trees) and designated parking bays for residents and visitors, with informal places to sit / meet as design features for pedestrian friendly environments. Surfacing should be permeable to reduce flood risk. Active travel modes should come before cars with safe, secure and convenient walking and parking spaces for cycles close to facilities and services.

Further advice Cornwall Design Guide chapters 4, 5 and BfL challenges: 2 walking, cycling & public transport 10 cycling and car parking.

5. **Nature: Does the proposal protect and make space for nature?**

All development should make space for nature, protecting and enhancing what is already there, including trees, hedges and water and making them a feature of the site. Biodiversity Net Gain should be provided in a way that joins habitats and makes space for nature. New bat, bird boxes or bee bricks, badger or hedgehog friendly fences, green walls and roofs, wildlife friendly kerbside guttering and ponds should also be incorporated for nature.

Larger proposals should include multifunctional and intergenerational spaces that encourage nature and allow people of all ages and access needs to meet.

Further advice Cornwall Design Guide chapters 4, 6, 7 and BfL challenges: 1 natural connections, 2 walking, cycling & public transport 11 green and blue infrastructure. Building with Nature.

6. **Can you see the drainage systems above the ground as surface features?**

Drainage should be included as part of the whole scheme design and mimic nature to manage surface water. This can include swales (shallow ditches) and pools which create a valued greener feel and appearance and preventing flood risk when part of open space and landscaping. Drainage features should not normally be hidden below ground but instead form surface features.

Further advice Cornwall Design Guide chapters 6, 7, 10 and BfL challenges: 11 green and blue infrastructure. Building with Nature.

7. **Homes and Buildings and Made to Last: Does the proposal consider the people who will live in, work in and use the development in the future?**

People spend around 90% of time indoors, with 65% of this spent at home. Design of new places and buildings should aim to create healthier environments. How developments are managed and maintained is also critical to their long-term success. We believe that allowing the community to have the option to oversee or manage communal space often leads to better outcomes. At a smaller scale, buildings should not require excessive maintenance to keep them sound and healthy; choosing long lasting materials is recommended.

Further advice Cornwall Design Guide chapters 6, 7, 10 and BfL challenge: 4 Homes for everyone Building with Nature.

8. **Does the proposal have usable gardens and appropriate frontages, boundaries and hedges?**

We believe gardens and access to green space are important for the quality of our lives. We therefore strongly encourage spaces large enough for drying washing, wildlife friendly planting, and safe areas of play for children and, where practical, the growing of vegetables. A rule of thumb for private outdoor amenity space (communal if serving apartments) is that, as a minimum, this should equal or preferably exceed the footprint of the building it serves. However, all gardens should be appropriate to their context which in most instances will equate to a requirement for gardens sizes larger than this.

An enclosed or well-defined private space to the front of properties should be provided. This can help to foster day to day interactions, a sense of ownership and natural surveillance. Enough space for landscaping is recommended. More generally, boundary treatments facing onto roads, footpaths and public space should be low walls/railings or, where possible, particularly in rural areas, Cornish hedges and native planting (with space for roots etc). Wooden panel fencing must be avoided where they face onto public highways, footpaths and spaces.

Further advice: Cornwall Design Guide chapters 6, 9 and BfL challenges: 11 Green & blue infrastructure, 12 Back of pavement, front of house. Building with Nature .

9. **Is there adequate external storage for bins, recycling, cycles and other lifestyle equipment?**

We expect all homes to include a covered bin store and secure convenient storage within the house and or on plot for cycles and other lifestyle equipment.

Further advice: Cornwall Design Guide chapter 9 and Appendix 2 and BfL challenges: 10 cycle and car parking, 11 public and private spaces and 12 Back of pavement, front of home.

10. **Resilience: Does the proposal respond to climate challenges and include energy efficiency and energy generation?**

Managing energy demand, encouraging on-site energy generation and water efficiency should be design considerations from the outset, rather than bolt on solutions. This might not reflect a traditional building's character but is a crucial element of future character, durability and sustainability. All new development should be as resilient to future climate as possible. The way we move around and live will have profound impacts on our climate, so making buildings more efficient must be achieved alongside a number of actions, including reducing the need to travel, providing space for nature and sustainable drainage.

Further advice: Cornwall Design Guide chapter 10 and BfL challenges including: 1 natural connections, 2 walking, cycling & public transport 3 facilities and services, 8 easy to find your way around, 9 healthy streets. Building with Nature.

Cornwall Council's Environmental Growth Strategy, the Nature Recovery Strategy and the 2017 Director of Public Health Annual report also provide useful information.