

# **ADOPTED SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING GUIDANCE**

## **NO. 2 RESIDENTIAL DESIGN GUIDANCE**

### **INTRODUCTION: HOUSING DESIGN MATTERS**

The Unitary Development Plan (UDP) sets out the Council's planning policies and reflects its commitment to improving the quality of the boroughs built environment. Policy H6 of the UDP relates to housing design and it should be read along with other relevant UDP policies in conjunction with this document. The other Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) provided by the Council should also be consulted.

This, the second in a series of SPG documents, explains the Council's commitment to maintaining Bromley as a place that is attractive, spacious, safe and green – but also economically vibrant and sustainable. The other SPG documents in the series include SPG1: General Design Principles, SPG3: Designing Out Crime and SPG4: Telecommunications.

The Council believes that good design is the key to maintaining, enhancing and developing the borough's residential environment. It is important to consider crime prevention in good design (see SPG3: Designing Out Crime). Good, high quality, and innovative design can provide mixed and balanced communities and improve the quality of the borough's existing environments. It can also help the Council achieve its housing targets in an ordered and carefully considered way and to help higher density development appear more appropriate within the local context. Good design makes better places.

This document was the subject of a public consultation exercise between June and November 2003, after agreement by Bromley Council's Development Control Committee on 3 June 2003. A draft SPG was published and distributed for consultation to community groups, residents associations etc. via the Council's newsletter 'Update', and also to various professional consultees within a regional context. The results of the consultation exercise were reported to Development Control Committee on 16 December 2003 and the Executive Committee adopted the resulting document as Council Policy and Supplementary Planning Guidance on 12 January 2004.

### **1 GENERAL ADVICE**

#### **1.1 Local distinctiveness**

The starting point for all new development should be a respect for the character and appearance of the site, its immediate neighbours and the wider street scene. Various types of character are defined in SPG1, and also in the Conservation Area SPG documents and in the descriptions contained in the UDP.

## **1.2 Amenity**

The provision of adequate space and light between buildings and impact on the privacy and amenity of adjoining properties are important factors that require careful consideration. The Council's side space policy normally asks for a minimum 1m side space. However, it should be noted that in areas where there is a greater spatial quality more than 1m side space will be required.

## **1.3 Setting and landscaping**

Every attempt should also be made to retain important elements on the site such as trees, established landscape and features of biodiversity interest. Of equal importance is the role gardens play in providing a setting in front of and around a building.

The creation of large areas of hardstanding rarely contributes to attractive front gardens. Amenity space should be both visually attractive and of some practical use to the residents. Where there is insufficient land to provide useful spaces the landscaping should be arranged to provide an attractive setting to the building, protect the privacy of residents, especially those living in ground floor accommodation and provide attractive edges and screening in keeping with the locality.

## **1.4 Design and form**

The character of the immediate locality should guide the built form and palette of materials. The use of quality materials and details on the front elevation of a building and inferior ones on the sides and rear is not normally acceptable. Similarly, the restriction of architectural treatments to only the front elevation should be avoided.

Many areas of Bromley have a strong established local distinctiveness. Careful study of their character can provide building forms and details that can help a scheme to enhance local character rather than harm it.

## **1.5 Roofs and dormers**

The majority of buildings in Bromley have traditional pitched roof forms, contributing greatly to the streetscape and roofscape of their localities. Roof alterations should be carefully considered to ensure that they respect the form and appearance of the existing roof. Continuation of the roof line may be appropriate in some cases – in other cases it may be better to drop the roof line so that extensions are subservient to the host building.

Dormer windows are common in many parts of the borough and traditional dormers can often guide the appropriate location, form and details of new ones. Large or dominant dormers, or those which harm the over-all appearance of the building, should be avoided.

## **1.6 Garages**

Often new garages, especially those integrated into the house, are the most dominant feature on the site. However, the front door should be the primary element in the composition, treated as the focal point of the building facade.

Domestic garages should not be obtrusive and discordant elements in the street scene. Garages in the front gardens are rarely acceptable as they lead to a loss of garden space and harm the setting of the house. Ideally new garages should be located to the side or rear. Those to the side are best recessed behind the established building line and detailed in a manner that complements the detailing on the host building. Garage roofs, as those to extensions, should be given careful consideration.

**1.7 Parking**

The Council is committed to reducing the dominance of cars and car parking on the public realm. Where opportunities present themselves, new parking should be provided at the side or rear of properties and separated by sufficient screening or distance from habitable rooms to protect residential amenity, orientation, and aspect.

**1.8 Fences and boundaries**

Boundary treatments make an important contribution to the street scene. In most areas front boundaries rarely exceed 1m in height and in some suburban locations development is laid out without front boundaries to give a spacious open-plan appearance.

In rural areas care should be taken to ensure that boundary treatments reflect the character of the countryside. Traditional hedges should be used where possible although simple timber hurdles may be appropriate in some instances. Decorative walls and fence types common to suburban areas are rarely acceptable.

All new boundaries should be carefully considered to ensure that they fit in with the height and materials of their local context. Consideration should also be given to the creation of sight lines for vehicles using the site. As a general rule materials and details should be kept as simple as possible; overly high, and excessively elaborate or grand treatments are not characteristic of the borough.

**2 RESIDENTIAL ALTERATIONS**

Probably most of the proposals in the borough’s residential areas are works to existing buildings. The majority of residential areas have been designed and laid out to high standards and have an attractive established character. It is therefore essential that all works to existing buildings are well designed and of a high quality.

**2.1 Gardens**

Many houses are placed in spacious plots and the gardens around them contribute to their setting, allow glimpses through to the rear, and contribute to the spacious and leafy character of their locality.

The loss of a substantial part of a side garden is likely to be harmful to the setting of the building.

## **2.2 Extensions**

The rear elevation is usually the most appropriate location for extensions but careful design and detailing is still required. Where side extensions are deemed acceptable it is good practice to set them back from the façade of the building to give the original elevation due prominence. When considering proposals the Council will also give consideration to design, general amenity, impact on neighbours and potential loss of daylight and sunlight.

All extensions should respect the composition of the host building, especially the roof and the rhythm of form and detail generally. Particular care should be taken to retain the architectural integrity of the host building. For that reason very large extensions, which overwhelm their host buildings, are unlikely to be acceptable.

## **3 NEW BUILDINGS IN ESTABLISHED AREAS**

### **3.1 Layout**

Local context is of particular importance when adding new buildings to established areas. Building lines, space between buildings, means of enclosure and the use and location of garden or amenity space should all respect the character of the locality.

New schemes adjoining busy roads should not generally face onto new internal layouts, as this results in high rear garden boundaries fronting the busy road. Such development has a deadening effect on the established frontages, presents an unattractive environment for pedestrians, often attracts graffiti and fails to provide sufficiently private rear gardens.

Where development fronts a busy road or other noisy environment such as a railway, the internal layout of the accommodation can be manipulated to ensure that the principal rooms are protected from the noise source by halls, kitchens and bathrooms.

### **3.2 Parking**

In residential areas of established character the creation of parking hardstandings on front gardens should be avoided as parked cars in such locations can create a cluttered and unattractive street scene. Where there is no option but to provide parking at the front it is important that proper consideration is given to reducing the impact through the use of screen planting and soft landscaping.

## **4 DEVELOPMENTS WHERE NEW STREETS ARE CREATED**

When designing schemes of this nature consideration should be given to the advice in SPG1, and *'By Design, Better Places to Live'*. The former provides guidance on the design and recommends the submission of a design statement to assist in the understanding of complex schemes; the latter provides detailed advice on design.

In new development particular attention should be paid to the provision of secure and attractive environments.

## **4.1 Layout**

Where opportunities for new streets and large areas of development occur, the layout should be integrated wherever possible into the existing street network. This will allow increased permeability for both pedestrians and vehicles and at the same time strengthen the established character of the locality.

Schemes should be designed around and sympathetic to remaining site features, whether built or natural, which are of value as wildlife habitats, amenity features or local landmarks. In larger schemes, landmark buildings can be used to add variety. These should not only be attractive features in their own right but should be sufficiently different from the adjoining buildings so that they can aid orientation within the streetscape.

Layouts that put particular emphasis on cul-de-sacs should be avoided, as they tend to restrict routes and discourage pedestrian activity. The relationship of the new buildings and spaces to the adjoining established built form should be carefully considered.

## **4.2 Parking**

Pedestrians and cyclists should be given priority in all new layouts and developments.

To protect residential amenity particular care should be taken to keep car parking sufficiently distanced from habitable rooms, or be well screened by landscaping. In suburban locations, wherever possible, parking should be placed out of sight, at the side of houses or in parking areas to their rear; the street should also be laid out to discourage on street parking. A variety of these approaches are illustrated below.

## **4.3 Building form and appearance**

Normally this should be dictated by the built form and materials used in adjoining areas. Local traditional materials tend to be more sustainable than modern alternatives and should be used wherever possible.

If a new proposal is to be successful, irrespective of its chosen architectural treatment, it must respect the character of its locality. New and old buildings can coexist happily without disguising one as the other; architectural treatments, materials and details are of particular importance and should be carefully considered.

## **4.4 Gardens**

Private domestic gardens contribute a great deal to the attractiveness of the borough. Increasingly, new developments propose front gardens that are very small and dominated by parking hard standings. In some instances, where space is limited, it may be more advantageous to consolidate the limited space into a central communal square or green and allow the houses to front directly onto the pavement. Such approaches are at their most successful when parking is integrated into the layout in a sympathetic manner, avoiding a dominance of parked cars. In schemes where there are elements of communal landscaping the long-term maintenance and management of the scheme should be provided for.

## **5 DESIGN IN THE PLANNING PROCESS**

The appearance of the proposed development and its relationship with its surroundings are both material considerations in determining planning applications and planning appeals. Applicants for planning permission should be able to demonstrate how they have taken account of the need for good design in development proposals and that they have had regard to relevant UDP policies and supplementary design guidance.

### **5.1 Informal design advice**

Applicants are encouraged to discuss their proposals with the Council prior to the submission of an application, so that it can provide design advice from an early stage. Careful and early consideration of the design issues can speed up the planning process.

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