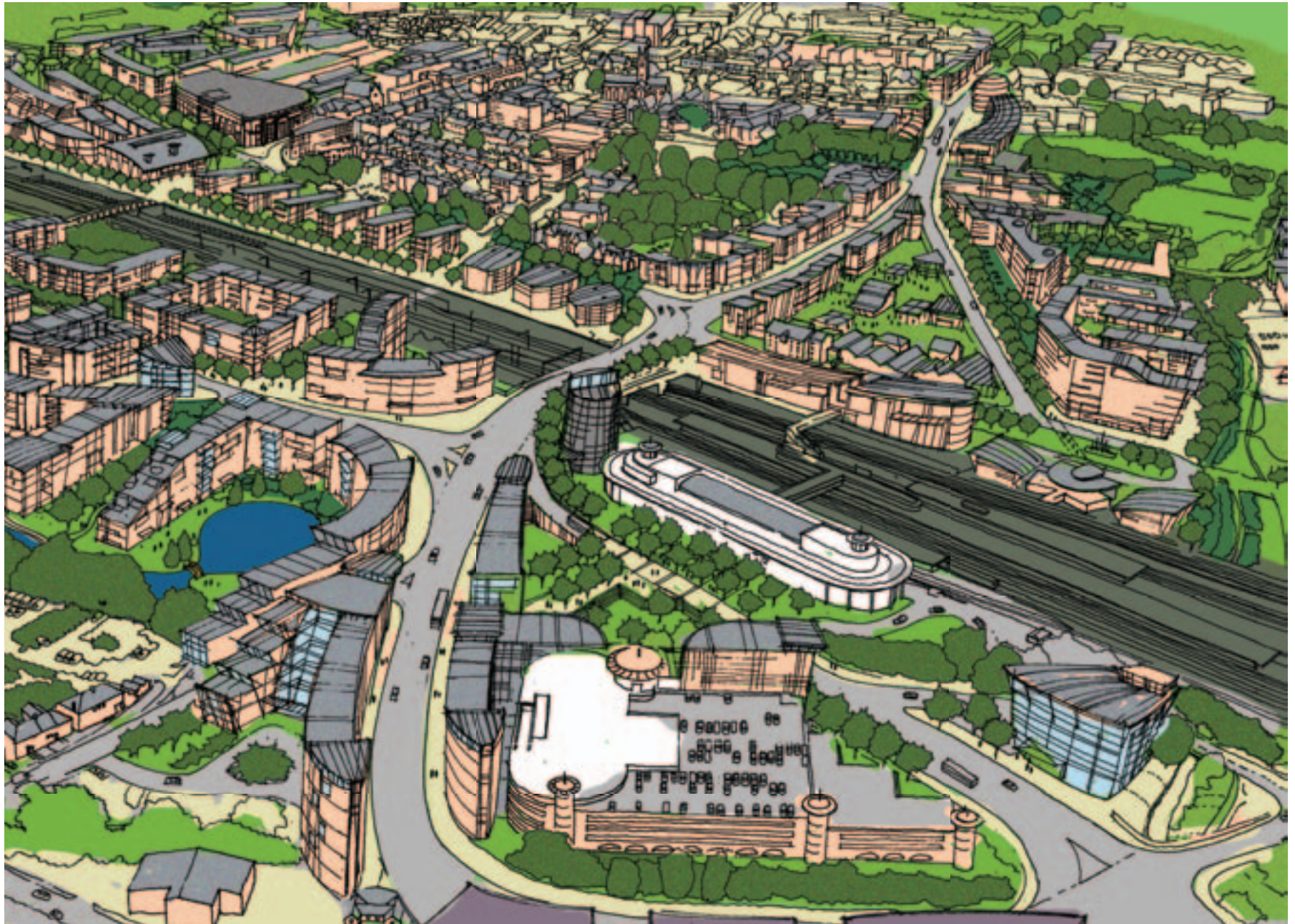


Getting the Planning Process Right



Ashford Town Centre Development Framework. (Urban Initiatives)

section 3

getting the planning process right

Key to achieving a quality product is a quality process.
At an early stage it is vital to establish collaboration between all parties and ensure that design excellence is made a priority for all.

A fast route to a successful planning application will be helped by:

- Appointing a professional architect-led **design team** with all necessary skills
- Holding early **discussions with planners** and carrying out a project appraisal
- Preparing an effective **development brief** for the site
- Using **best practice guidance**
- Preparing a sound and thorough **statement of design principles** for the scheme to explain the design rationale
- Submitting good clear **drawings, illustrations and models**
- Encouraging **community involvement**.



Good quality and informative drawings and visuals showing a development in context help to sell the scheme. (Chatham Maritime.)



Models are a great way of helping people to understand how a proposal works in context.

“Proactive planning through pre-application discussion and design guidance can help the council meet its planning deadlines.”
 CABE, The Councillors Guide to Urban Design



Good design rarely happens without a skilled and experienced design team. (Kent Design Award winners - Cheney Thorpe and Morrison Architects).



Community participation. To shape a proposal and ensure local buy-in is the cornerstone of successful design. (Lord Street/Parrock Street, Masterplan Consultation).

3.1 Assemble a Design Team

A good design will add value to any development and a strong design team led by a skilled architect is the fastest route to achieving a high quality design. The RIBA will provide advice on the appointment of a suitable architect and the selected architect can then advise on the make-up and range of skills required. An architect should be selected who has a track record in designing similar projects. References should be sought from previous clients and occupants.

For larger more exciting projects, consider a design competition which will provide a choice of concept designs and design approaches before you finalise the choice of design team. The design competition will incur time and cost but the end result will be an early scheme design that can be taken to outline planning stage more quickly. This may save time and money in the long run, as well as helping with publicity, marketing and consultation.

The Kent Architecture Centre can advise on design competitions and, for a fee, may be prepared to manage the design competition process.

3.2 Discuss with Planners

Developers need early advice about the planning issues and local planning constraints and aspirations to get the best out of the design team and to avoid abortive work. An early meeting should be arranged with the local authority planners to identify key guidance, relevant issues and the best way to engage with key stakeholders and produce a scheme that everyone can sign up to. The local authority is encouraged to set up its own 'development team' of professional advisers to assist the developer during the scheme design and planning submission stages.

Pre-planning advice is essential if the scheme is in an area where there are environmental, conservation or other development sensitivities. It will be beneficial to carry out the 'site and project appraisal' before meeting with the planners so that the key issues are focused upon.

The planners will advise at an early stage whether the scheme will require a Transport or Environmental Impact Assessment. They will also advise on what is expected of the Statement of Design Principles and the Sustainability Strategy.

For a major scheme, it will be beneficial to hold an early 'design workshop' in which key local authority officers, neighbours and local interest groups can participate so that the developer becomes aware of the primary issues of concern from the start. Ideally, all participants should sign up to a broad 'masterplan' that will then generate a development brief for the site.

Local Authority Development Team Approach

To meet the need for an efficient and integrated response by the local authority, an effective approach is to establish a development team for major and strategic sites, bringing together all those with an interest in an application. Depending on the nature of the development, this may include planners, urban designers, conservation officers, transportation/highway specialists, archaeologists, landscape architects, ecologists, legal representatives, education and social services, health services, fire and police.

Good leadership of a development team is essential. Co-ordination of feedback to the developer will usually rest with the local planning authority's case officer.

More complex schemes are likely to draw in a wider range of interests, but the principle of ensuring that the appropriate advice is fed back to the developer at the appropriate time will apply whatever the scale of development.

3.3 Prepare a Development Brief

The development brief should set out the main planning issues from the Kent and Medway Structure Plan and the Local Plan. There may be Supplementary Planning Guidance or local design policies to which the development brief should refer, such as design codes, Village Design Statements or, indeed, *the Kent Design Guide*.

The development brief should identify the overall quantity of accommodation and mix of uses within the scheme; storey heights; location of different uses, public and private space, traffic and highways and other issues from the client design team. It may also express aspirations in terms of materials, form, scale, massing and other design matters. A brief which includes a high level of design detail for a very large scheme is effectively a 'design code'. This will ensure that, even if each plot is developed separately over a long period of time, the overall development retains design integrity and cohesion.

3.4 Use Best Practice Guidance

There is a plethora of design guidance available. The key national, regional and local guidance is available from the following sources. Contact details are found in 4.2 Further Reading and Guidance.



A site visit to the area and pre-application discussion is an invaluable way to assess a proposal. (Lacuna, Kings Kill)

CABE: For major schemes with a significant impact, the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) will review your scheme at an early stage. The review panel's comments will be helpful in shaping the design or reinforcing the main points of your design statement. Any member of the public can ask CABE to review a scheme that has been submitted for planning consent if the scheme is important enough and they have concerns about any aspects of the design. If there is a chance this may happen, then the developer should contact CABE

first and make sure that the scheme will secure CABE's approval if challenged. CABE produces a significant amount of design guidance and also provides a design advisory service.

SERDP: For major schemes with a regional impact, valuable advice on architectural and urban design quality is provided by the South East Regional Design Panel (SERDP). SERDP can arrange an independent review of a scheme on behalf of a developer, site owner or local authority and provides a neutral forum for debate. SERDP involvement at the concept/design stage can assist with the formulation and application of design principles and the subsequent Design Statement. SERDP can be contacted via the Kent Architecture Centre which manages the panel on behalf of SEEDA and with the support of CABE.

Kent Design Initiative: Locally, *the Kent Design Guide* provides design guidance specific to the character and context of Kent as well as general good practice for most forms of development. Local plans, design codes and village design statements will provide more detailed guidance. If developers have followed expert design guidance, used a good architect and are proud of their project, they should consider entering it in the Kent Design Awards Scheme, when completed on site. The aim of the awards is to create a legacy of outstanding buildings – these could become the listed buildings of the future. A Kent Design Award will not only add prestige to a scheme, but to the neighbourhood and to Kent as a whole.

3.5 Prepare a Statement of Design Principles

A statement of design principles (Design Statement) must accompany the planning application. It is a summary of the design objectives for the scheme and the philosophy and rationale behind these objectives. The design statement will explain the development proposals to the Planning Authority and take them through the thought processes that have led to the design. The Statement should demonstrate that proposals take account of the content of Local Development Frameworks and Supplementary Planning Documents, show how the scheme relates to the site's character and context and how it has developed from the site appraisal.

If design objectives broadly fit the Kent Design Guide and any local Supplementary Planning Documents, the scheme is more likely to gain approval. If the scheme contains big departures from existing guidance it will be wise to discuss these aspects with the local authority before submission of the application and agree on any points of contention.

Landscape Plans, a Transport Assessment and an Environmental Impact Assessment will be required for most large schemes as well as the Design Statement.

3.6 Use Good Drawings, Illustrations and Models

It is important that the drawings and illustrations that accompany the planning application are of high quality – unambiguous, easy to read and show all aspects relating to the development, including its immediate surroundings. If a good architect has been employed, good, clear drawings will usually result. The better the drawings and presentation material, the easier it will be for the planners and the planning committee members to understand the scheme.

Plans, sections and elevations should show the surrounding context so that appropriate judgements can be made about how the development fits in with its surroundings. If there is adjacent development, then the scale, form, massing, proportions, building and shoulder lines, connecting routes and paths should relate in some way to produce a sense of integrity, harmony and cohesion – and this must be readable from the drawings.

Artists' perspectives will help show how the development will look and feel at eye level. But however good drawings are, they are never as good as a 3D model for demonstrating how a development can fit in and add value to its context. Modern computer visualisation can show how it feels to move through a scheme and its surroundings but nothing beats a physical model for appreciating the reality of a future development and its impact on its surroundings. A model does not have to be expensive to show this – a simple working model in wood, card or sprayed polystyrene will often work well, providing it is to scale and shows the context and surroundings accurately.



Computer modelling can give a feel for how a development sits in its context and the character of new streets and spaces. (Horsebridge and Brownings Yard, Whitstable).

3.7 Involve the Community

The public and their representatives have an important role to play at key stages in the development of projects and in the preparation of Local Development Frameworks, conservation area appraisals, Development Briefs and Village Design Statements. Participation should be encouraged as a scheme develops. It is important to identify and involve those groups and individuals affected by a proposed development in order to increase the understanding of development ideas and local priorities. Community involvement in the design process can help designers and developers become fully aware of local priorities and concerns as well as helping the community develop understanding and interest in the scheme and its constraints and opportunities.

For a major scheme, there may be a number of potentially negative impacts, so gaining the support of the community may rely on demonstrating the benefits from any new facilities, or the way in which the new development increases the cultural, economic or environmental value of its surroundings. A new development should integrate well with its surroundings and not turn inward or away from its neighbours.

3.8 Monitor the development

Monitoring should occur after completion of the development on the effectiveness and achievement of objectives relating to built form, car parking, landscape, open space and nature conservation.

Monitoring will be important, especially in terms of understanding local characteristics and comparing design ideology with the realised scheme. In addition it can ensure that the key elements and conditions of planning permissions are properly implemented during the construction process and that the desired quality of design is achieved.

Monitoring allows the effectiveness of design features to be measured for future comparisons; for instance, water-demand management, reduced car parking, higher development densities. With innovative schemes it may also assist in identifying planning conditions or legal agreements to address otherwise unforeseen problems.

There may be cases where it is reasonable for the Local Planning Authority to impose planning conditions which require a developer to establish a monitoring regime responsible for dealing with problems arising from the failure to meet specified tolerances. Examples include noise emissions or air quality. Local authorities can also carry out monitoring.

The Glossary provides further information on a toolkit of documents and techniques to support the planning application process.

CHECKLIST FOR THE PLANNING PROCESS

- 1 Have you appointed an architect-led professional design team that has a track record in high quality design?
- 2 Has your design team carried out a thorough site and project appraisal?
- 3 Has your design team met with the local planners and its internal development team and identified the key planning issues?
- 4 Is there a Local Development Framework, design code, Village Design Statement, Conservation Area Appraisal or relevant Supplementary Planning Guidance?
- 5 Is a Transport Assessment, Environmental Impact Assessment or Landscape Scheme required?
- 6 Has your design team sought and followed CABE, SERDP and Kent Design guidance?
- 7 Has your design team consulted with key stakeholders and the local community?
- 8 Has your design team prepared high quality plans, perspectives and a model?
- 9 Has your design team prepared a convincing Statement of Design Principles?
- 10 Have you got a regime for monitoring the effectiveness of the development in place?
- 11 Will the scheme be good enough for a design award or future listing?
- 12 Would you want to live or work there?

This checklist appears in Appendix X and can be copied to help assess the scheme and discuss it with local planners.

