



MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD

Section 8

Built Environment



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BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Design

- 8.1 New development should provide high quality homes, employment and other activities in support of sustainable development for the long term. High quality design and attractive environments can encourage investment and economic development in an area, support social inclusion and help to create civic pride and community cohesion, providing and protecting an enduring built environment which people are proud of. Good design is therefore a key element in achieving sustainable development, and in achieving the objectives of this Plan.
- 8.2 The council's vision is for Medway to be a location of quality development and correspondingly high quality environments. This is key to fostering happier, healthier residents that are proud of their homes, towns and communities where they live. The Council will also seek to create a destination of choice to support businesses and employment creation. The attractiveness of the Medway area (public realm, appearance and offer) is fundamental in supporting and nurturing a stronger local economy. The council will seek to achieve its aims for Medway as a Dementia Friendly Community through consideration of accessible design principles in the public realm and new developments. Whilst the style of building and its adaptability are important considerations in attracting a range of business, its setting is just as important. Good design that supports a high quality environment and offer will be promoted, and is a key aim of this Local Plan.
- 8.3 Comments received through the Issues & Options consultation confirmed that the emphasis of the design policy should be focused on:
- Preserving and enhancing heritage assets;
 - Support for the creation and preservation of open space, habitats, biodiversity and general enhancement of the natural environment;
 - In new developments, on appropriate massing, scale, appearance, morphology and connectivity; generally good design that is safe, inclusive, not car/parking dominated, and supports place identity.
 - Developments embedded within existing built fabrics (whether urban or suburban) should be well connected for pedestrians, cycles, and public transport. They should be appropriately connected for the car, yet not parking dominated.
- 8.4 The objective of this policy therefore is to achieve good people centred layouts and design for all new development that relates appropriately to its carefully considered context, and this should be the aim of all involved in the development process. The council is keen to encourage development solutions that will embrace sustainable planning objectives in order to deliver positive outcomes for the environment.



Policy approach: Design

Development in Medway will be expected to be of high quality design that makes a positive contribution appropriate to the character and appearance of its surroundings. Fundamental considerations of development proposals will include:

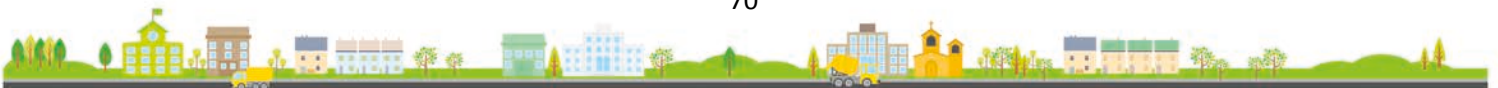
- The scale and form of development is appropriate to its surrounding context and is characteristic of Medway
- How the proposal relates to and/or reinforces the local distinctiveness and character through the use of high quality materials, landscaping and building detailing
- Responds appropriately to the character of the area, interprets respectfully the prevailing pattern of plot size, plot layout and building siting, roofscapes, mass, bulk and height, and views into and out of the site
- Makes efficient use of land and ensures appropriate streetscapes
- Good connectivity and clear user hierarchy for pedestrians, cycles, public transport and cars
- Ensuring that streets and spaces within new residential developments are not overly car dominated.
- Demonstration of provision and/or access to essential services and facilities
- Respects the amenity of neighbouring uses through consideration of light levels, overshadowing, overlooking, loss of privacy, visual intrusion, appropriately designed car parking and ensuring minimal impact through noise, vibration, fumes or light pollution, and other relevant considerations.
- Creates a safe environment
- Buildings that are appropriately flexible/adaptable and in appropriate circumstances transformable in the interests of sustainable life-long places.
- Provides for discreet waste and recycling bin storage and collection.
- High quality landscaping making use of or retaining features considered relevant/important by the Council and demonstrating linkages/contribution toward green infrastructure assets and networks.
- Achieves a transition from urban to rural where appropriate
- Includes measures to mitigate and adapt to climate change

Housing Design

8.5 Through the introduction of the Nationally Described Space Standard which lays down minimum internal floor areas for dwellings, the Government has established that residential amenity and adequate space within homes is a planning concern.

8.6 Planning Practice Guidance issued by the Government alongside the National Standard nevertheless requires local planning authorities to provide justification for requiring internal space standards by:

- the identification of a need for such policies;
- the effect of the policy on viability, particularly land supply; and



- the establishment of transitional arrangements to enable developers to factor in the cost of space standards.
- 8.7 Achieving adequate residential standards remains a key planning objective for the Council, especially given the scale of growth envisaged for Medway. It is important that new development is designed to ensure long-term social and economic sustainability, continuing the quest for lifetime homes and to reduce future obsolescence in the face of changing economic, demographic and social trends.
- 8.8 The Impact Statement carried out with regard to introduction of the Medway Housing Design Standards (MHDS) in 2011 provided evidence of the need for space standards. It also established that meeting the standards would not have an undue effect on viability. This has proved to be the case since their introduction as the vast majority of new dwellings constructed since the introduction of the Medway local standards have been compliant.
- 8.9 The Council will not be in a position to adopt the National Standard¹¹ until it has produced and adopted its new Local Plan. However, given that the criteria of need and viability have been covered by the present MHDS, the Council will continue to expect that the internal floor areas of dwellings submitted for planning permission are adequate, and will use the National Standard as guidance on this matter, supporting existing policy relating to amenity.
- 8.10 Schemes that comply with the internal floor areas laid down in the National Standard will be deemed to have adequate internal space by the Council.
- 8.11 In addition to the internal space standards that are the subject of the National Standard, the MHDS has specific standards on the following topics, which developers should continue to adhere to:
- Shared outdoor amenity space
 - Shared access and circulation
 - Cycle storage, refuse and recycling
 - Management
 - Visual Privacy and Private Outdoor space
 - Environmental comfort
- 8.12 Housing choice, flexibility and attractiveness are key considerations for people wishing to live in the area. The creation of functional spaces and the adaptability of a home will provide a better opportunity to secure long term occupation, i.e. lifelong homes. In a changing environment with greater emphasis on climate change and supporting people to be able to carry out their day-to-day activities, the adaptability of a dwelling is also important.

¹¹ However, it carried out extensive consultation with regard to the Medway Housing Design Standards (MHDS), which lays down very similar space requirements to the National Standards. This work included an extensive 'impact assessment' that demonstrated that MHDS was not unduly onerous and that it would not have an undue impact on the quantum of development that would be achieved within Medway.



Policy Approach: Housing design

New housing developments should provide good living conditions for future occupants with high quality, robust, adaptable housing and functional spaces that respond to changing resident needs throughout their lives and support the undertaking of necessary day to day activities. All new accommodation must, in addition to the general design policy above:

- As a minimum meet the relevant **nationally described internal space standard** for each individual unit
- As a minimum meet the Medway Housing Design Standard (MHDS) for external spaces including shared outdoor amenity space, shared access and circulation, cycle storage, refuse and recycling, management, visual privacy and private outdoor space, environmental comfort
- Be arranged to ensure primary habitable rooms have an acceptable outlook and where possible receive direct sunlight
- Be designed to minimise the disturbance to occupants from other land uses nearby and/or other sources of noise, vibration and pollution
- Provide a convenient and efficient layout, including sufficient circulation space and avoiding awkwardly or impractically shaped rooms, unless there is justification for doing so on the basis of a significant design quality gain.
- Incorporate sufficient space for storage and clothes drying
- Meet energy efficiency targets and the higher national water efficiency standard of 110 litres/person/day.
- Encourage the extensive use of trees as a positive contribution to air/environmental quality within housing developments.
- Be designed with a clear and particular attitude to place making and distinctiveness within their context.

Housing Density

- 8.13 There is a great variation in housing densities across urban and rural Medway. The higher density Victorian terraces in central urban areas contrast to lower density post war suburban development. More recently higher density apartment blocks have emerged along the frontage to the River Medway around Gillingham and Chatham.
- 8.14 National policy, as outlined in the NPPF, encourages locally set density requirements¹². This is in order to help authorities boost the supply of housing within their areas and make the most efficient use of land, where this does not compromise the quality of development.
- 8.15 In considering options for Medway's development over the plan period, the council will explore opportunities to achieve higher densities in appropriate locations with the benefit of excellent public transport links. Such an approach has the potential to make a positive contribution to place-making. However development must respect the character and amenity of the surrounding area. Given the significance of

¹² National Planning Policy Framework – Part 6, para 47



Medway's heritage assets, this will be an important matter in determining the acceptability of development proposals.

- 8.16 In line with meeting the differing needs for types of housing in Medway, the council recognises the need to plan for a range of densities in new developments to achieve sustainable development and deliver successful and attractive places with a distinctive sense of place.

Housing Density Approach

The council will seek the efficient use of land and secure positive contributions to place-making through supporting developments at higher densities in appropriate locations, where it can be demonstrated that it does not create an unacceptable impact on the surrounding amenity and environment, and has the potential to boost the vibrancy and vitality of town centres.

Density should be reflective of the particularity in its surroundings and make the most effective and efficient use of land.

The council will consider varying attitudes to density on a case by case basis in developing masterplans and development briefs for regeneration sites.

Densities surrounding transport interchanges (railway stations and bus stations) will be expected to be higher to reflect the nature of these areas as transport hubs providing sustainable travel choices.

A range of house types should be considered regarding housing mix.

Heritage

- 8.17 The historic environment in Medway is an irreplaceable asset that lies at the heart of the local character and sense of place. It has an interrelationship with many areas of planning, assisting in the delivery of sustainable development through tourism, environmental improvements and social inclusion.
- 8.18 Medway benefits from some of the region's most recognisable historic assets, including the castle and cathedral in Rochester, Chatham Historic Dockyard and Upnor Castle. Historic assets such as these help to create an attractive place to live and work; drawing in investment and providing unique opportunities for heritage led regeneration. However it is the entirety of wider heritage assets and the historic environment reflecting the area's rural, industrial and military past that collectively inform Medway's character.
- 8.19 Many of the heritage assets in Medway are protected under statute, in the form of over 600 Listed Buildings, 70 Scheduled Monuments, 2 historic parks and gardens, and 24 Conservation Areas. However, the historic environment is much broader than this and includes undesignated assets such as historic landscapes, historic development patterns, important views and vistas, and areas of archaeology.



- 8.20 A number of historic assets in Medway are considered to be 'at risk' through neglect, decay or other threat. Assets considered 'at risk' will be monitored by the council, who will seek to bring them back into use and/or into a good state of repair.
- 8.21 In support of the Local Plan, the council will undertake a review of the area's historic assets and set out a strategy for their conservation and enjoyment.
- 8.22 In meeting the needs for new development over the plan period, the council will ensure that the important heritage features of the area are given appropriate recognition.

Policy Approach: Heritage

The council will support the conservation and appropriate enhancement of the historic environment by:

- Restricting development that could have an unacceptable impact on a designated heritage asset and its setting;
- Ensuring that new development in Conservation Areas enhances their significance and special qualities, whilst respecting the historical and architectural character;
- Ensuring that all new development contributes to local distinctiveness and identity;
- Encouraging development that makes sensitive use of historic assets, particularly where they are under-used or redundant;
- Promoting the preservation of historic buildings considered to be 'at risk'.
- Resisting demolition or destruction of heritage assets without substantial justification that clearly demonstrates that public benefit outweighs the harm or loss resulting from the demolition or destruction.

