

Good design - eight points to help ensure good design and future heritage creation – a position paper by The Guildford Society

It is undeniable that good design helps to build communities, creates a better quality of life, and makes places more comfortable for people to live, work and play in. It is the Society's position that good design should be at the heart of ensuring that new developments and building refurbishments or conversions in the Borough respect its heritage and create buildings of quality and architectural merit to form the heritage of the future. This will enable today's citizens of Guildford to hand on The Town to the next generation in a better state than we acquired it.

1. A good Town Centre Master Plan should include a comprehensive Design Guide. The results of such initiatives as the *Farrell Review of Architecture and the Built Environment* should be incorporated into the Design Guide as 'best practice' for driving forward good design. GBC should also ensure that this guide is publicly consulted on and widely communicated to citizens and the development community. It should also ensure that it is applied to all future developments in The Town so that new and refurbished buildings embrace the principles of good design and hence enhance and enrich Guildford's commercial and aesthetic future.

A good design policy is only as good as the people that seek to apply it. Where a planning team does not have sufficient members that are fully qualified to design buildings, then its approach often defaults to one of setting simplistic guidelines to prevent the worst mistakes. This limits the opportunity for creating strong and innovative architectural solutions. As a consequence, to effectively implement a good design policy the Society will challenge GBC to commit to up-skilling its planning team.

2. The NPPF states that Local Authorities should have local design arrangements in place, and recommends setting up independent design review panels. Design Review is an independent and impartial evaluation by a panel of experts on the built environment with the skills necessary to appraise and offer observations leading to improvements. They do not attempt redesign. Their review gives planners confidence to encourage quality and innovation. It is independent, expert, multi-disciplinary, accountable, transparent, proportionate, timely, advisory, objective and accessible

Such panels are in place and used by certain neighbouring Authorities. The Society will liaise with appropriate professional bodies to bring forward proposals to assist GBC with establishing such a Design Review Panel and offer its services, on the basis of the Principles and Practice set out in the guidance document published by the Design Council (in association with CABI, the Landscape Institute, RTPI and RIBA) to meet the NPPF requirement.

3. Developers that embrace good design should be publicly rewarded. One way that this can be achieved is by substantially increasing the public awareness of design awards to both local and national levels including Guildford's own Design Awards programme¹ which promote and recognise successful projects and credit owners, architects and builders. Developers should also be actively encouraged to think of themselves as "patrons of good architecture" and be made aware of the financial benefits accruing by creating effective and iconic buildings.

¹ <http://www.guildford-heritage.org.uk/DesignAwards.htm>

- 4 The GBC Design & Heritage Champion's role should be clearly defined to enable them to play a critical and proactive role in planning pre-applications, acting as a truly independent and pro-active champion and as conduit of information with outside bodies.
- 5 GBC should develop and apply the concept of Permitted Development Rights to smaller projects so that owners are encouraged to consult an architect and invest in a well thought out design without the risk of the scheme not being granted planning permission. Owners are also reminded of the Society's views on a wide range of development related matters which are set out in the Society's position papers when considering a development.
- 6 For larger projects, responsibilities for ensuring good design should be clearly allocated across participants. The developer should be responsible for the financial viability and the architect for the design and for specification of materials. Clear articulation of the benefits to be derived from good design should be encouraged.
- 7 Primary responsibility for protecting the public interest both in respect of an individual building but its wider context within the public realm should lie with GBC's planning team. One of their roles should be to protect the public where the developer may have little interest beyond short term financial profit and the architect exerts little influence, a situation which does not normally result in the creation of well-designed buildings. Specifically, planners should:
 - ▶ Apply their powers to ensure that sufficient open space is allocated in new developments.
 - ▶ Ensure that the urban grain is distinctive and adds character to The Town. This includes involvement in determining the scale of new streets, lanes, squares and other urban spaces to ensure that the urban grain is developed and enriched. Blandness in the grain, even more than the individual uses of the units, will result in a disappointing "anytown" character and will fail to capitalise on the benefits of being a "gap town".
 - ▶ Spot opportunities to make space that could be potentially helpful for public transport services notwithstanding that they do not have direct power to control traffic. Planners can however ensure space is allowed for off-road bicycle routes and in large new developments for drive-in-drive-out entrances for buses where these are appropriate.
 - ▶ Restrict the height of buildings so that they blend into the existing urban fabric. Given the height of existing buildings in The Town, building heights of more than four or five storeys will generally be unlikely to meet this principle.
- 8 Finally, to realise these aspirations, the general public and interested local bodies must all contribute if Guildford is to continue to conserve and create high quality and new heritage.

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