

Good design matters



Foreword

The Crown Estate has a very diverse property portfolio across the UK, both in urban and rural settings.

Every day we manage and develop our property interests, and in doing this, on our rural estate, are aware of the unique quality of the rural landscape. We also appreciate that many people who identify with rural communities would like to live in such settings.

Development in rural locations can often be an emotive issue. That is why we have a firm commitment to work in partnership with local communities to ensure we respond to local sensitivities. It is also why all our development activities are supported by our core values of commercialism, integrity and stewardship, which inform the way we behave and the actions we take.

I want to ensure that all new development put forward by The Crown Estate makes a positive contribution to the landscape and to the community. A key role in achieving this is the one played by design.

Design is something everyone has an opinion on, and, quite often, the only consensus that can be reached is that 'good' design matters.

This design guide sets out our commitment to good design and to setting quality standards through the design process and then seeing these through to final developments on the ground.

Good design results in good quality buildings that last, buildings that are loved and buildings that are environmentally and economically sustainable.

We are determined to deliver good design, each and every time.

Nick Harper
Head of Asset Management & Development

The Crown Estate

On behalf of the nation

The Crown Estate manages a highly diverse £6.6 billion property portfolio across the UK. Our objectives, which are laid down by Parliament under the Crown Estate Act 1961, include enhancing the value of the estate and the revenue it produces.

Every year we pay all of our surplus revenue to the Treasury for the benefit of the nation: in 2009/10 this was **£210.7 million**.

The Crown Estate is above all a commercial organisation with a strong sense of stewardship and a commitment to manage our assets sustainably. Our integrity is measured in the relationships we build, how we manage our estates, the long term approach we take to our investments and the support we give to communities.

The Crown Estate's property comprises four estates: urban, marine, rural and Windsor.

■ Urban estate

The urban estate consists principally of major commercial holdings concentrated in London's West End and major towns and cities around the country.

■ Marine estate

The marine estate includes around half of the UK's foreshore, the beds of tidal rivers and estuaries and almost all of the seabed out to the 12 nautical-mile territorial limit around the UK. It also includes the rights to explore and utilise natural resources (excluding hydrocarbons) of the UK continental shelf.

■ Rural estate

The rural estate is one of the largest in the UK with almost 146,000 hectares (360,000 acres) of agricultural land, forests, minerals and residential and commercial property in England, Scotland and Wales.

■ Windsor estate

The Windsor estate covers around 6,300 hectares (15,600 acres) and includes Windsor Great Park, Home Park, The Royal Landscape, forestry, residential properties and some commercial properties including Berkshire and Swinley Forest golf clubs and Ascot Racecourse.



About this guide

Why design matters

The Crown Estate actively pursues development opportunities on its estates.

We are, however, acutely aware of our responsibilities as a landowner and developer.

We have set out our approach to development – one of partnership and collaboration with local communities – in our ‘Building in Partnership’ brochure.

This design guide takes this approach one step further with the aim of giving our stakeholders, be they local communities, local councillors, or development partners, a better understanding of our aspirations and intentions when it comes to developing and designing new buildings on our rural estate.

We want this guide to inspire and give confidence that a Crown Estate development will make a positive contribution to a community and be an asset to be proud of.

The Crown Estate’s design guide sets out some parameters for good design while allowing scope for creative, individual approaches to designing new housing and other buildings and public spaces. It aims to assist our partners, be they architects or developers, to achieve high standards of design and construction by promoting a consistent approach across our estate.

An approach which will ensure development on The Crown Estate’s land is of the highest quality and is sensitive and respectful to the local setting.

Put simply, we can’t afford not to invest in good design.

High-quality new development is a vital ingredient for the viability and growth of communities.

It helps address many of the problems communities face, such as a shortage of affordable housing, high unemployment, lack of community facilities and social infrastructure.

Development can often be an emotive issue and can rouse intense debate. People are quite rightly concerned about what impact development will have on their communities. Getting the approach to design right can bring huge benefits to local communities.

The Crown Estate understands that development needs to respond to local sensitivities. In particular, the design of new development needs to:

- respect the landscape and setting
- respond to local vernacular and characteristics
- respect the local environment.

Design is something everyone has an opinion on, but rarely is a consensus reached. However, most would agree that well designed developments add something positive to the local environment and to the communities in which they are built.

Good design is about creating attractive and positive places that make a successful contribution to local communities. Design is not only about how buildings look and work but also about areas around them: paths, streets, open spaces – from a single building through to a major new neighbourhood development.

Benefits of good design

Well designed development can:

- create better places to live and work
- improve quality of life
- enhance the local environment
- attract new people to a town or village
- enhance the local economy
- inspire and motivate people.



Our core principles

The Crown Estate holds certain key principles which we seek to apply to the design of new developments:

Enhance the existing character of the local area – reinforcing local patterns of development and landscape.

Offer variety – creating developments that offer variety in the form of buildings, materials and mix of uses.

Easy to understand and move around – our developments should be clearly laid out and easy to get to and move through. They should provide people with a real sense of place.

Places people will be proud of – our developments will have attractive, lively and pleasant public spaces that draw people together and create a sense of place.

Enduring and flexible – we will design developments that are built to last and which are suitable for each stage in people's lives.

Good to the environment – our developments should minimise impact on the environment through the use of sustainable materials, reducing energy use, and making the most of opportunities to walk, cycle and use public transport.



The Burnhill Green development has transformed our area for the better. I have been particularly impressed with The Crown Estate's approach to working with us and to listening to the views of local residents.

Councillor Joan Burton MBE,
South Staffordshire Council



Putting our principles into practice

The Crown Estate's development at Burnhill Green, near Wolverhampton, is a benchmark for our approach to quality design and demonstrates how we put our principles into practice. In developing Burnhill Green, The Crown Estate has worked in partnership with the local community and the local authority.

In the heart of the countryside, the development combines the latest green technologies with traditional British crafts and materials.

The new homes conform to the village's established architectural style and meet Level 4 of the Code for Sustainable Homes. A landscaped area in front of the new houses creates a new ecology-rich village green. The development has been awarded CABE's Gold Standard for Building for Life.

Designing neighbourhoods



Creating quality neighbourhoods

Sustainable communities are based on strong neighbourhoods, whether at a village scale, or as part of a town or city. Quality neighbourhoods have a sense of identity and a sense of connection to place, to history and to wider communities.

Neighbourhood design relates to street and building design

Neighbourhoods are areas of development on a scale that we would recognise as the wider area to which we belong, with a distinguishable sense of place, a focal centre and access to a range of local services. A small village might consist of a single neighbourhood. Larger villages, towns and cities are normally comprised of a number of connected and distinct neighbourhoods.

A neighbourhood contains or provides access to a wide range of services and activities including homes, employment, education and administration, retail, transportation and recreational opportunities.

Neighbourhoods are linked to the movement and green space networks of surrounding areas.

These connections are created by streets, spaces and buildings. The way in which these components are designed determines a neighbourhood's character and sense of place.

Key criteria

Homes

The most sustainable neighbourhoods have a mix of homes of different sizes, types and tenures that are within walking distance of key local services, including shops and community facilities.

Supporting facilities

Each neighbourhood should be planned around a local centre as the focal point for life and activity. Connections to the centre must be provided with clear, legible and safe routes. Access to surrounding areas should be through well designed footpaths, cycle routes and roads.

Connections

Key facilities and sustainable transport connections should be 5 – 10 minute walking distances (400 to 800m) to homes. Priority should be given to sustainable transport options including walking, cycling and bus routes to discourage the use of cars and to promote healthy lifestyles.

Open spaces

Open spaces should include a range of outdoor sports and children's playing spaces that respond to local needs and the local context. These spaces should be linked by routes with trees, vegetation and smaller green spaces and should complement the wider landscape and ecology, enhancing the existing local features.

Safety

Streets and open spaces should have a clear function and hierarchy. Open spaces should positively relate to adjacent buildings and land uses and be clearly linked to the network of streets and green infrastructure.

Local distinctiveness

This should be strengthened through the selection of street and building types, materials and densities of development that respond appropriately to the local context and character of existing townscape and landscape. This adds legibility and a sense of place and helps to reinforce the hierarchy of streets and spaces.

Sustainability

These criteria are underpinned by core principles of economic, social and environmental sustainability, which are essential to establishing successful neighbourhoods and addressing climate change. A creative approach will be required to enhance environmental opportunities, make effective use of resources such as land, water and energy and provide an efficient route for all modes of transport.



Upton, Northampton

Designing streets

Creating quality streets

Streets are a vital part of the public realm, providing safe and convenient movement networks within and beyond the neighbourhood. They need to be designed with walking, cycling and sustainable transport as the priority.

How street design relates to neighbourhood and building design

Neighbourhood

Streets and spaces are component parts of the wider neighbourhood area. The links provided by streets and spaces form the movement network of the wider neighbourhood.

Buildings

Buildings and their settings effectively define the streets and spaces that make up the public realm. The quality of streets is largely determined by the quality of the interface between buildings and the public realm.

Key criteria

Clarity of form and function

Each street needs to reflect a clear form and function in order to help reinforce the sense of place and legibility of the wider neighbourhood. Street types include main streets, residential streets, lanes, mews, cycle routes and footways. Each needs to be designed to suit its particular function and role in the movement network of the wider neighbourhood.

Proportions

The street proportion of height to width should follow a hierarchy with main streets being widest and therefore able to accommodate the tallest buildings (generally 1:3 ratio up to a maximum 1:6 ratio), down to mews and lanes being the narrowest street types with lowest building heights (possible 1:1 ratio).

Public and private spaces

A semi-private zone should be incorporated as an interface between the public street and private building. Buildings, gardens and landscape elements form the enclosure and containment of the space which forms streets. Street enclosure should vary along its length in response to context in order to create variety and richness within the street scene.

Corners

Street corners are often key to the quality of a street and place. Good enclosure with overlooking windows or balconies helps to provide natural surveillance and avoid 'dead' spaces created by blank buildings or boundary walls.

Focal buildings and spaces

To aid legibility and strengthen the sense of place, streets should be punctuated with buildings and spaces that provide memorable landmarks. These may be formal or informal and may fulfil multiple functions but should respond to the townscape or landscape to provide a sign-posting role.

Streetscape

Each street type should use a distinct palette of materials and street furniture to reflect and suit its function, with generally more resilient and higher quality urban finishes on the main streets feeding down to less formal layouts and finishes on lower order streets and lanes.

Cycle and pedestrian footways and crossings

Priority should be given to the quality of the pedestrian and cycle experience within a street. In streets that also accommodate cars and other vehicles, carriageways need to be appropriately sized to accommodate traffic volumes.

Trees

Trees can help to improve the environmental quality of streets. They should be provided in response to the context, using a character and type that complements the character of the street or wider areas and may be integrated with sustainable drainage.

On-street parking

This can provide useful street activity to help provide natural surveillance as well as providing useful and flexible parking to support surrounding activity. The visual impact of street parking needs to be balanced with trees and planting.

Integrated design

Bus stops, signage, lighting and sustainable urban drainage need to be considered and integrated into the street scene in a way that helps to enhance the appearance and strengthen the visual character of the street.

Designing buildings



Delivering quality buildings

Buildings play a key role in determining the quality of the environment. They are places where people live and work and can have an impact on the quality of people's lives. Sustainable building design helps to significantly reduce consumption of energy. Buildings also generate value and need to make optimum use of land. The design, placement and setting of buildings are fundamental to successful place-making.

How building design relates to street and neighbourhood design

Streets

Buildings are component parts of a street and should contribute collectively to the quality of this space by responding to the local context.

Neighbourhoods

Each building is effectively a destination within the street network that forms part of a neighbourhood or wider settlement.

Key criteria

Responsive design

Buildings must work on a number of levels, being environmentally responsive, efficient in land use terms, and reflecting their function and place. Each of these requirements must be taken into account in devising the scale and form; the internal layout; the articulation of windows, doors and balconies; the design of details and the selection of materials; and the design of outdoor space for functional, recreational and servicing requirements (including waste). Responsive design is unlikely to be achieved solely by the use of standard house types.

Massing and proportions

In general, the more that buildings are grouped together in terraces, the greater their energy and land use efficiency. However, this needs to be balanced with the visual effect on the surrounding area, and the functional requirements for service and parking access and separation. Both the height of a building (number of storeys and roof type) and width of a building frontage (narrow or wide plot) should reflect the building and street hierarchy.

Energy use

Building design should minimise carbon emissions and maximise opportunities for passive energy savings, through both the thermally efficient design of the building envelope and through the orientation of the internal layout to take advantage of thermal buffering and storage, natural ventilation and solar gain.

Adaptability

The principles of 'Lifetime Homes' should be adopted whereby buildings can change in response to the needs of the occupier enabling them to remain in the building for longer. Access should be open to all in line with Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) guidelines.

Entrances and windows

These should be clearly and appropriately detailed and articulated within a balanced façade and street composition. Renewable sources of timber or recycled aluminium frames should be used in preference to UPVC.

Boundaries and gardens

Walls, fences and planting should all be selected carefully to respond to the role of the building within the street and setting. Close-boarded timber fencing should be avoided as a boundary to streets or open space.

Cycle and vehicle parking

Parking should be integrated with the buildings setting to minimise the visual impact on the public realm. On-plot parking should always seek to place the parked car or cycle behind the front building line to minimise impact on the street.

Materials and details

Careful consideration should be given to the choice of materials and the design of details. The choice of materials should respond to the local building vernacular in order to help reinforce local identity and sense of place. The local sourcing of materials or use of recycled materials should also be considered to optimise environmental sustainability.

Method of construction

Modern methods of construction should be considered alongside traditional methods and be selected based upon the setting, context and response to local vernacular. Whilst time-tested building techniques and materials will always have a place in the creation of quality places, opportunities for innovation should be maximised to allow buildings to reflect the time in which they are designed and built.

Delivering quality

Setting design quality standards

The Crown Estate takes a long term view of its landholdings which includes the sale of parts of its estate for development. In preparing sites for development The Crown Estate fully consults with the local community and key stakeholders on its plans prior to seeking outline planning consent. This process embeds design quality into the strategy for the development of any site from an early stage and is articulated in a number of documents supporting an outline application such as a Design and Access statement.

Principles established through this design process will form the basis for a series of design quality standards to be adopted through the delivery phase of the development. Design quality standards will be set for all sites for sale to ensure that any development on former Crown Estate land will achieve design quality.

Design quality standards document

A design quality standards document will accompany all sales particulars as part of the sales pack requiring a developer to respond to site-specific identified design quality criteria as part of their submission to buy the land. The response to the design standards quality document will be considered alongside the financial bid when the developers' assessment is submitted.

The design quality standards document will set out the various standards to be achieved such as:

- relevant National Design Guidance
- relevant Local Design Guidance
- code for Sustainable Homes Level
- BREAAAM rating
- a Site Specific Design Brief
- a Design and Access statement (accompanying an outline planning application).

Design brief

Bespoke design briefs will be prepared for all Crown Estate sale sites. Many of the sites will have already been progressed through the planning system achieving outline planning consent prior to sale. As such, the detail of the design process to secure this consent will be used in the sales pack to articulate to developers the outstanding reserved matters to be taken forward and the design standards set to ensure these are taken forward in line with the approach to quality.

Design codes

On larger, more complex sites and where multiple land ownership may need co-ordination, The Crown Estate will undertake to lead, facilitate and contribute to the production of a design code. The design code will set out more detailed parameters for the key components of the development such as the public realm, main streets and spaces.

Such Design Codes would be tied into the sale of the land to ensure any subsequent developers are tied into the delivery of the quality of place as defined in the parameters set out.

Design quality control

The following quality control mechanisms will be used as appropriate:

- design assessment
- design review
- monitoring.

Developers seeking to buy land with planning consent from The Crown Estate will have their proposals assessed against the site's design quality standards and design brief. Established design quality review methods will be used and proposals assessed against a range of design quality themes covering functionality, impact, build quality and sustainability.

A design review, alongside financial bids, will inform the final decision on the selection of the preferred bidder for the sale of a Crown Estate site.

Review of design development

Once the preferred developer has been selected, The Crown Estate will work with the developer and their design team to ensure that the quality standards are maintained through the reserved matters planning process. All reserved matters applications will be required, via a contractual obligation, to be signed off on design quality grounds by The Crown Estate prior to submission by the developer to the local planning authority.

Monitoring

After the developer has secured full planning consent, The Crown Estate will undertake a continual review of the development on the ground as it is being completed. This will ensure all the details of quality are seen through to completion and The Crown Estate will require, via a contractual obligation, each development plot to be signed off on design grounds prior to release for sale.



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