

# site appraisal

section two



## 2. Site Appraisal

36. It is important that when designing a new development, that these issues are addressed in a logical order and it is suggested that the order should generally reflect the order set out in this guide – it is little use to carefully detail the streets and spaces if the layout does not effectively connect the development with its surroundings. In short, it is necessary to get the ‘fundamentals’ right before moving to the ‘detail’.

### 2.1 Assets and Physical Constraints of the Site

37. At the beginning of the design process it is essential to determine the assets and the constraints, such as any natural features and the geography, boundaries and thresholds of adjacent sites and buildings, services, highways, open space and landscaping. In some cases the constraints may also include the retention of existing historic buildings or features on the site or views of historic buildings adjacent to the site. These will be the specific site attributes that require a design response.

38. The site evaluation process may throw up conflicting issues, how these have been prioritised and addressed should be explained in the Design and Access Statement.

#### 2.1.1 Topography and Natural Features

39. The topography of a site is an important part of its character and should be integral to any design proposal. Flattening and levelling a site is not



Development on steep hills such as this one in Uttons Avenue Leigh should normally have staggered floor heights to accommodate gradient.



Views of the Thames Estuary should be considered an asset to any development site.

necessarily the best option and can create structural problems.

40. New buildings and extensions should work with the landscape and seek to make best use of the site’s existing topography and natural features. For example:

- Steep gradients are often seen as a building constraint but they may offer estuary views and vistas or shelter from noise and wind. The contours of the site should be one of the factors that determine the footprint of the development. (Taller development on elevated sites will have an impact on the wider skyline existing views and the appropriateness of this will be considered in any application. For further guidance on tall buildings see Section 4.3) It is important to note however, that the land stability of steep sites should also be carefully investigated and in some



‘Outlook’ flats at Shoebury Garrison take advantage of the coastal outlook.

cases remedial measures may be required as part of the development process.

- Mature landscaping and trees can instantly soften a new development, offer privacy and provide an enhanced outlook and offer habitat for many local species. New proposals should be designed to accommodate existing trees and other landscape features such as hedges and areas of established wildlife habitat, wherever possible.

*See also Section 8.12 Biodiversity & Section 4.6.1 Landscaping*

### 2.1.2 Flood Risk

Policy Link - Core Strategy Policy KP2; Development Principles – 11b  
Core Strategy Policy KP3: Implementation and Resources – 2c

41. One of the major assets of Southend-on-Sea is the Thames Estuary, but its location adjacent to a large tidal estuary means that some areas of the town may be at risk of flooding. Fluvial and water run-off flood risk also exists in other parts of the Borough. In cases where there is a risk of flooding the sequential test should be used to determine whether there are other more suitable sites for the development. In the case of development proposals along the Seafront, this area has been identified in the Core Strategy DPD Policy KP1 as a location for focussed and appropriate regeneration and growth (a spatial strategy that has been found 'sound' by an Independent Inspector), so the sequential test to determine whether there are other more suitable sites for development should be limited to other sites within the seafront area only. There are a range of flood risk categories along the seafront and developers should aim to locate new developments in the lower risk areas where possible.

42. Development in such areas will be required to assess the risk and provide flood mitigation measures as necessary. The first consideration should be the inclusion of sustainable urban drainage systems (SUDS) and surface water management plans which make the most of the benefits of planting areas and porous surfacing to improve natural drainage and flood storage, conveyance, re-creating functional flood plain and setting back defences as temporary

water holding measures. There may be limited scope to achieve these in some areas of the seafront and where these methods are not sufficient, other flood resistance measures such as internal flood proofing, improved drainage systems, flood barriers and bunds may also be required. All development must use porous surfacing to hardstandings and surface car parking areas to allow free drainage.

43. The risk of flooding can never be removed entirely and development in high risk areas should be designed to minimise disruption and the cost of flooding should it occur. Developments should be designed so that they can be brought back into use as soon, easily and economically as possible and therefore should be designed to be easily renovated after flooding. Building materials and utilities should not need replacing. In all cases vulnerable uses, in particular residential uses, should not be located at ground level. These should also be explained in the flood risk assessment.

*For further information on Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems see Section 8 Sustainable Development and Design and Communities and Local Government Publication 'Improving the flood performance of new buildings' which can be viewed at [www.communities.gov.uk](http://www.communities.gov.uk)*

*Developers may be required to submit an assessment of the potential flood risks with their planning application – see Section 13 Submitting an Application. Further information on the Sequential Test for flooding can be found in Planning Policy Statement 25: Development and Flood Risk and the accompanying best practice guidance which are available to view on [www.communities.gov.uk](http://www.communities.gov.uk).*



The green roof at the bowls pavilion at Priory Park will significantly reduce the surface water run off the building.



The towns seaside buildings have a special character and their designs often include balconies and other decorative features.

## 2.2 Character and Context

Policy Link - Core Strategy Policy KP2:  
Development Principles – 5,6,10  
Core Strategy Policy CP4: The Environment and  
Urban Renaissance - 5

### 2.2.1 Townscape

'Design which is inappropriate in its context, or which fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions, should not be accepted.' (PPS3: Housing).

'An appreciation of local climate, urban form, culture, topography, building types and materials is necessary to nurture local distinctiveness.' (Urban Design Compendium 2, English Partnerships 2008)

44. The character of a place is unique. It can be defined by many things, some are broad in nature and some are identified by details. Within Southend Borough there are a wide variety of characters ranging from the tight knit Victorian and late Victorian terraces in south Leigh, Westcliff and Southend to the later more spacious development in Eastwood, Thorpe Bay and Shoebury. The Seafront and the town and local centres also have very different characters.

*See also Section 1.7 Overview of the Borough and Section 4.2 Scale, Height and Massing, Areas of Uniform Character.*



Some areas of Leigh and Thorpe Bay have a more suburban feel, they are generously more spaced and surrounded by extensively landscaped verges.

45. When designing a new development or an extension to an existing building it is essential to ensure that the scheme is informed by and complements local character. Enriching the diversity between different areas of the Borough and strengthening of local distinctiveness will be encouraged.

46. The character of all immediate neighbours and the wider townscape should inform the layout, scale and design of any new development. How much of the surrounding area should be looked at will depend on the scale of the development and the sensitivity of the site. A design solution that is appropriate for one site is not necessarily appropriate in other areas. New development should build on the positive aspects of local character, not usually copy it.

47. Developers should be able to demonstrate that their designs have been considered and respect



This terrace in Prince Street, Southend is typical of the late Victorian/Edwardian housing in much of Leigh, Westcliff & Southend.

local character. This type of analysis will be required in the Design and Access Statement accompanying all applications

*See Section 13 - Submitting an Application.*

48. The following list provides an outline of the things that should be considered when assessing the special character of an area:

#### **Location and Links to the Wider Area**

Is the site on a main road, in a local, district or town centre or within a quieter more residential area? How accessible is the site? Are there good links to local facilities and public transport? How can these links be utilised and improved through any new development? Is there the potential to make new connections through the site?

#### **Historical Development and Local Vernacular**

Does the area have a significant history? Is it a conservation area? Are there any historic buildings on or adjacent to the site that must be respected? Is there a predominant building style in the street? Are there any archaeological interests on the site?

#### **Urban Grain and Morphology**

What is the pattern of development? Is it uniform or informal? Is the grain tight knit or loose and open? What is the relationship to adjacent areas? What is the permeability of the area?

#### **Public and Private Spaces and Enclosure**

Is the street narrow and enclosed by buildings or is it a generous width and defined by open corners and junctions? Are there public spaces nearby? How do



Development from late 20th Century in Shoebury and Eastwood has a very different character to the central & southern areas of the Borough.



Strong gable features & rough cast render are distinctive to these houses in Burges Road, Thorpe Bay.

these relate to the streetscene and the buildings? What are the desire lines of the space? Can the quality and connectivity of the space be improved through the development? Are there gaps in the street frontage that cause an uncomfortable lack of enclosure?

#### **Uniformity and Rhythm of Buildings**

Is the streetscene characterised by the order and rhythm of the buildings or are they all different? Are the materials, windows, roof forms, building frontage lines, storey heights similar or is there a diverse range of form, scale and materials?

#### **Topography, Natural and Built Landmarks, Views and Skyline**

What is the landform of the locality? Are there any watercourses or coastlines? Are there views of natural features or local landmarks, in or out, or through, the site that should be preserved? Is the skyline seen from other parts of the Borough? Which buildings are important?

#### **Natural Environment and Trees**

Do the existing trees and vegetation make a significant contribution to visual amenity, biodiversity and character of the wider area? Are they important in the streetscene and / or local wildlife? How can they be incorporated within the design proposal? Are there any Tree Preservation Orders or protected species on the site?

#### **Streetscape**

Are there any special items of street furniture or gateway features that contribute to the streetscape and should they be retained? Are there items of street clutter and barriers to movement that can



Colour forms a key element at the new character created by this greenfield development in Lifestans Way.

be rationalised as part of the development? How are the property boundaries defined? Who are the neighbours? How close are the neighbours to the boundaries of the site? Are the frontages to the site public or private?

### Function and Uses throughout the Day and Night

Is the character predominately residential, commercial or mixed use? Is it in a town or local centre? Is it vibrant and busy or quiet and calm?

#### 2.2.2 Enhancing Character

In areas where the existing character is weak, designs which bring new character and quality will be considered. New development should preserve the characteristics of an area or create a new characteristic that will provide an enhanced local identity.

### 2.3 Assessing Capacity

49. New developments will have an impact on the existing infrastructure. For example all proposals are likely to increase the number of vehicular trips and demands on service suppliers. Residential units may also create additional strains on school capacity and parking. It is therefore essential to ensure that the local infrastructure, facilities and networks are able to cope with increased demand new development will place on them. Major schemes must demonstrate that the proposed development will not have a detrimental effect on existing infrastructure and will normally be expected to make financial or practical contributions to improving the provision of local infrastructure and services in accordance with the

Council's adopted and emerging policies. These are usually secured through a legal agreement.

*For further information see the emerging Planning Obligations DPD which will be available to view at [www.southend.gov.uk](http://www.southend.gov.uk) in due course.*