

SUFFOLK DESIGN GUIDE FOR RESIDENTIAL AREAS

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Introduction

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1.0.1 East Anglia has the fastest growing population of any region in the UK. The Suffolk Structure Plan envisages some 54,000 new dwellings will be built in Suffolk between 1988 and 2006. Most of these new houses will be built as estates on the edge of towns and larger villages.

1.0.2 This design guide aims to set out the principles, or guidelines which should be adopted by all those involved in the development of housing areas whether it be developers, housebuilders, local planning authorities or the utilities. The Guide advocates the adoption of an integrated design process where all of the elements of layout and design, the roads, the planting, the siting and external appearance of the houses are considered as part of a single comprehensive process rather than in isolation.

1.0.3 The Design Guide is intended to make a positive contribution to improving the quality of housing development in Suffolk. The Local Authorities trust that all concerned in housing development will seek to achieve the very highest standards of layout and design.

1.0.4 The aims of the Design Guide are to:

- Reflect the essential character of Suffolk in new housing estate development within the County;
- improve the visual appearance of housing estates;
- reduce the impact of new housing on the landscape and to ensure that new development relates to its surroundings;
- improve the quality of life for residents;
- ensure the provision of a road, cycle and footway network which is safe and convenient to use and which does not detract from the attractiveness of the estate.

1.0.5 The most successful layouts are those which, from the outset, embody a co-ordinated approach with attention being given to all aspects of design and which respect the context of the site. Mediocre layouts often arise when undue emphasis is placed upon one aspect of the design at the expense of other equally important factors, such as varied street-scene and landscaping. In recent years, this failure to take a co-ordinated approach has given rise to many road-dominated estates which, whilst often functionally acceptable, lack interest and variety.

1.0.6 Listed below are the main elements of successful layouts, which should form part of the designer's considerations at the very beginning.

Planning Background

1.1.1 The Structure Plan identifies the scale and location of major new development in the County. The Local Plan will allocate specific sites for new housing and provide more detailed policies on matters such as housing density, conservation, design and landscape.

1.1.2 The developer should ensure that he is aware of the planning background to the site, for example, local plan policies, development briefs, statutory designations such as Conservation areas, Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Tree Preservation Orders and Listed Buildings. When allocating land for housing local planning authorities will, whenever possible, produce site-specific development briefs which will set out the framework for development, having regard to the planning policies and advice contained in this guide. Where a development brief does not exist, the developer is advised to liaise with the Local Planning Authority and the Highway Authority at the earliest possible stage in order to determine the main principles which should be adopted for the satisfactory development of the site.

1.1.3 Housing designs should be based upon an understanding of the site and its surroundings, resulting from a detailed site survey and analysis (see Appendix A). The details required to support a planning application for housing development are set out in Appendix B.

Safety

1.2.1 Safety should be a primary concern, with the following groups of users being considered:

Pedestrians

Pedestrians, especially the most vulnerable groups such as children, the elderly and people with disabilities, should feel secure in their immediate residential environment. Safe pedestrian routes, whether footways or separate footpaths, need careful design, appropriate lighting, and attention to crime prevention. Design should facilitate movement, and where shared surface roads are provided, the safety of pedestrians should be paramount.

Cyclists

Cycling represents an environmentally desirable alternative to motor vehicles. The needs of the cyclist should be addressed in the design of housing estate layouts. Children are one of the main users of bicycles and are most vulnerable. Particular care will be needed in the design of cycling facilities where schools are to be provided.

Motorists

Residents rightly expect to be able to drive their cars in safety from their homes to work and for leisure. Roads should be designed to cater for the passage of vehicles in a safe manner at an appropriate speed, in order to minimise conflict with other road users. The aim should be to provide a safe residential environment. This will usually entail a road hierarchy, with the motorists having priority on local distributor roads and the pedestrian having priority on residential roads.

Variety

1.3.1 Many recently-built housing estates have rightly been criticised for their lack of variety and visual interest. A limited number of house types, poor quality building materials and fixed block spacings and building lines, have given designers of housing layouts few options. The pursuit of variety for its own sake, however, can be inappropriate and may deny the designer the option of pursuing a common theme. Nevertheless, diverse house styles and building lines, careful detailing, good workmanship and materials all add to the richness of the overall street scene. House designs and materials should reflect the variations in local character which arise throughout the County.

Amenity

1.4.1 Privacy, light and space for private leisure pursuits are essential for the occupants' enjoyment of their property and contribute to the overall amenity of the area.

Access to Facilities

1.5.1 Residents have a reasonable expectation that large estates will have facilities such as schools, community centres/village halls, and public open space provided at an early stage. Access to these should be convenient and safe as well as attractive. Early consideration should be given to the location of the facilities and their transport links. Smaller estates should be integrated into existing communities, with thought being given to appropriate links to existing facilities nearby.



Planting and Landscaping

1.6.1 Trees, shrubs, paving and walls are essential assets to the appearance of housing estates. The landscape design for the whole estate, including retention of existing features and provision of appropriate public and private open spaces must be incorporated as part of the initial layout. Landscaping applied as an afterthought is seldom as successful as that integral to the original design concept.

Maintenance

1.7.1 The best housing estates are those that 'mature' without recourse to expensive maintenance and where adequate provision is made for the upkeep of landscaping, surfaces (roads and footpaths), common areas (shared car parks) and community facilities.

Servicing

1.8.1 Utility services should never dictate the form and content of estate layout or landscape design. Routes for services should avoid any area identified for planting in the landscape design.

Security

1.9.1 The safety of people and the security of property need to be taken into account in the design of housing estates. Regard should be paid to the advice of the Suffolk Police, as embodied in the 'Secured by Design' award initiative.

Providing for People with disabilities

1.10.1 One of the aims of the Design Guide is to improve the quality of life for residents. In this respect, considerations of safety for pedestrians and access to facilities will be of particular benefit to people with a mobility handicap. However, such provisions are of limited value if applied to estate layout considerations only. Developers are therefore advised to consider internal house design to make homes more accessible.