



The countryside charity Gloucestershire

Change is inevitable: it should be for the better

POSITION STATEMENT 11 BUILDING DESIGN

Summary of policy position

CPRE Gloucestershire encourages the highest quality of building design, recognising its importance from an environmental, social and economic perspective.

Key principles include ensuring that:

- *buildings are in harmony with their neighbours*
- *buildings respect local vernacular styles*
- *buildings are designed in a way which minimises their environmental impact*
- *provision of green infrastructure and measures to enhance biodiversity is part of the design process and not an afterthought*

We look to local planning authorities to place good design of buildings and their surroundings at the heart of planning policies; and we encourage the adoption of design guides and that Local Plan policies should include a requirement for development proposals to follow such guidance.

Introduction

This Position Statement sets out CPRE Gloucestershire views on how to make good building design a reality. *Quality* is the key: quality in analysing the character of an area, in design, and in execution.

Gloucestershire's landscape and many of its settlements are outstanding, but different parts of the County have their own distinct character – the Forest of Dean, the Severn Vale, and the Cotswolds. These reflect the three (out of 159 in England) National Character Areas, respectively NCA 105, NCA 106 and NCA 107, which cover nearly all of the County. The challenge is to ensure that built development is both visually attractive and sustainable, and that it respects and enhances this local distinctiveness.

CPRE considers that good building design is important:

- From an *environmental* perspective, well-designed development sits comfortably within the landscape, reflects its position in relation to the settlement of which it will be a part, and has an architectural style which responds to the immediate built environment and the core character of the settlement. Importantly, it also minimises its environmental impact.

- From a *social* perspective, good building design contributes to a sense of place and to our quality of life
- From an *economic* perspective, high quality working environments are good for business.

CPRE attaches great importance to achieving good design, but however good the design it cannot mitigate the adverse effects of inappropriately located development.

What the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) says about design

Section 12 of the NPPF focusses on the importance of “achieving well-designed places.” The 2021 revised version strengthens the policies and introduces a requirement for planning authorities to prepare design guides or codes. Important statements include:

- *“The creation of high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities...” (paragraph 126).*
- *“Plans should, at the most appropriate level, set out a clear design vision and expectations, so that applicants have as much certainty as possible about what is likely to be acceptable. Design policies should be developed with local communities so that they reflect local aspirations and are grounded in an understanding and evaluation of each area’s defining characteristics...” (paragraph 127).*
- *“To provide maximum clarity about design expectations at an early stage, all local planning authorities should prepare design guides or codes consistent with the principles set out in the National Design Code and National Model Design Code and which reflect local character and design preferences...” (paragraph 128)*
- *“Development which is not well designed should be refused, especially where it fails to reflect local design policies...” (paragraph 134).*

CPRE Gloucestershire: Principles for Built Development

Our definition of building design is broad, covering overall style, layout, massing and density as well as the more focused issues of architecture, materials and sustainable construction.

- New buildings should be appropriate to their setting: design should reflect local character and distinctiveness
- New buildings should minimise their wider environmental impact, contributing to achieving net zero carbon emissions and conserving water
- New development should respect settlement form, including existing street patterns, and the relationship of buildings to open spaces

- Large housing developments should include a variety of styles
- Urban extensions should have a soft edge with the landscape, and if situated on a main access point they should act as an announcement to the settlement: village and town extensions should also respect the views of the settlement from the surrounding countryside
- In our three AONBs, the quality of design should reflect their national status as protected landscapes
- The scale of and form of building should respect that of neighbouring properties and the spaces between them: buildings need to be in harmony with their neighbours if the character of the area is not to be undermined
- The form and scale of new buildings and extensions should respect local vernacular styles and materials but should not simply copy the design of existing buildings in the area. High quality innovative architecture should be encouraged
- Architectural detailing is critical: it should reflect local distinctiveness and traditions, including the treatment of wall and roof materials, windows and doors, eaves and verges, and boundary walls and hedges
- New development should contribute to green infrastructure and nature recovery and where appropriate include sustainable urban drainage systems (SuDS). This should be an essential part of the design process and not an afterthought: significant and valued existing landscape features should be retained where possible and new features introduced. All significant developments should include public space in their design and layout
- Developers should aspire to meeting 'Building with Nature' standards. These should be specified in Local Plan policies
- Restoration projects should respect the integrity of the original building, both externally and internally where practical
- Building conversion projects should demonstrate sensitivity to historic practice in design and construction and the building's former use.

In applying these principles to CPRE planning casework, we would expect any planning application to demonstrate an understanding of the local and wider character of the settlement and landscape of which the development will be a part. Where the immediate surroundings are a poor example of local character, the design of new development should either reflect the core historic style of the settlement, or have its own distinct character and demonstrate the highest architectural standards.

Sustainable Construction

All building works – whether for new building, renovation or conversion – should be designed in a way that minimises environmental impact and contributes to the target of achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

Energy conservation measures should be widely promoted. Examples might be: careful design and orientation of new buildings to maximise solar gain in the winter and minimise it in the summer; the use of construction materials with good thermal efficiency; and ensuring the highest standards of insulation. Measures to save water should be incorporated, and maximum use of recycled construction materials encouraged.

The use of renewable energy technologies should be encouraged. In particular, where practical, all new build domestic, commercial and industrial development should include the provision of solar power installations and retrofitting of existing buildings should be strongly encouraged. We will press for appropriate policies in Local Plans.¹

Achieving High Quality Design Through Development Plans

Local planning authorities, through their development plans, and local communities, through neighbourhood plans, should place good design of buildings and their surroundings at the very heart of policies for the area.

Government Planning Practice Guidance (2014) states that *a local or neighbourhood plan is essential to achieving high quality places. A key part of any plan is understanding and appreciating the context of any area, so that proposals can then be developed to respect it. Good design interprets and builds on historic character, natural resources and the aspirations of local communities.*

We will encourage all planning authorities to adopt detailed design guides as soon as possible in accordance with NPPF paragraph 128. Local Plan policies should include a requirement for development proposals to follow such guidance.

Master Plans and Design Briefs

Larger developments, such as those proposed following strategic housing land allocations in Local Plans, will benefit from the preparation of master plans or design briefs for the area. These would be drawn up in a partnership between the planning authority, developers, local communities, and other interested parties. We will encourage the preparation of such plans and design briefs.

¹ See the CPRE Gloucestershire Position Statement 8 on Energy Production and CPRE's design guidance on photovoltaic installations on buildings.

ADDENDUM - AGRICULTURAL BUILDINGS

This addendum identifies specific considerations which apply to buildings directly linked to agricultural operations, both cropping and livestock husbandry. It is not intended to cover development relating to diversification enterprises.

Almost all of the principles set out in the main body of this Statement are relevant to farm buildings. However, there are factors which do justify regarding them as a 'special case'. In particular, modern agricultural and horticultural buildings are often, and necessarily, very much larger than 'traditional' ones and location is dictated by functional need and the existing infrastructure of the holding. Cost considerations are also critical unless the capital cost can be separated from the economics of the overall business, which will not generally be the case.

Function

The starting point must be to choose a design and location which will meet the functional need, otherwise there will be no point in constructing the building. Key considerations include:

- the dimensions of the building must meet peak demand on space and allow for access of the largest machines which are necessary to use it effectively;
- it must be structurally sound for its purpose;
- for livestock buildings well designed ventilation is essential for animal health; and
- for storage of perishable crops, such as potatoes, the building must be adequately insulated for frost protection and against unwanted solar gain.

All of these factors will affect the appearance of a building and place limits on the design options available. Despite this, a well-designed new building which is not obtrusive in its surroundings need not be significantly more expensive than a poorly designed one. It is essential that the building and its location can meet its intended purpose, but that need not mean it cannot be made to look attractive rather than an eyesore, as many modern farm buildings are.

General Design and Location Principles

Despite the constraints which function may dictate, there are a number of general principles which should be considered in order to minimise adverse landscape consequences. These include:

- effective integration with existing buildings on the holding – subject to functional practicality;
- avoidance of skyline development;
- reducing the impression of bulk by design features such as oversailing eaves, creation of shadowlines and stepped rooflines – the last may be particularly effective on sloping sites;
- use of muted colours which do not 'clash' with the local countryside – dark greens, browns or blues are generally less obtrusive than brighter or paler colours;

- a building with a roof which is darker than its walls will be less obtrusive, as will one where the walls have two distinct elements – eg metal cladding or spaced boarding above masonry;
- unless there is an essential need for reflective qualities, matt finishes for sheet cladding are less obtrusive;
- durability and long-term maintenance aspects should be carefully evaluated in the initial design and costing. For example, whilst untreated fibre cement sheets tend to weather to a darker grey over several years, poor colour treatments which are initially attractive can peel or differentially fade to become unattractive and expensive to put right; and
- if feasible on the site, use of new planting of appropriate species to ‘break up’ the slab appearance of a large new building can be very effective.

All of the above points reflect the key principle – that the design should be thoroughly thought through (and costed for both capital expenditure and maintenance) before embarking on the project.

Consideration for Neighbours and the Wider Environment

Some agricultural operations result unavoidably in noise, dust and odours. This can be a particular problem with buildings housing large numbers of livestock where the adverse consequences apply over a substantial part of the year.

Notwithstanding functional considerations, a new building which will inevitably have significant adverse consequences for neighbouring properties and its immediate locality must be located so as to avoid such consequences, even where that incurs additional cost or some inefficiency in operation. For such buildings siting is a critical factor and may rule out or inhibit the nature of the intended development.

Solar Energy

The extensive roofs of many modern farm buildings are eminently suitable for solar energy installations. This should be the norm, wherever feasible.

Sources of Further Information on the Design and Appearance of New Farm Buildings

A number of local planning authorities, National Park authorities and AONB partnerships have published useful guidance. At the time of publishing this addendum, two good examples are:

Bromsgrove District Council: ‘Agricultural Buildings Design Guide’ -

<http://www.bromsgrove.gov.uk/media/1076534/SPG-5-Agricultural-buildings-design-guide.pdf>

North York Moors National Park Authority: ‘New Agricultural Buildings’ -

http://www.northyorkmoors.org.uk/planning/framework/spds/DesignGuide5_web.pdf

Updated May 2022 to reflect changes to the National Planning Policy Framework.

CPRE Gloucestershire Position Statements are regularly reviewed and updated as necessary. They should be read as a set.