



Oldham and Rochdale Urban Design Guide

Consultation Draft
February 2007



Foreword



The contribution that high quality design can make to urban regeneration is now widely recognised. Good design can bring economic, social and environmental benefits; add to quality of life; attract business investment; and reinforce civic pride. In partnership with Tibbalds, Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council and the Oldham and Rochdale Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder, we have prepared a series of documents that set out the key principles of urban design and provide guidance on the creation of high quality buildings and places.

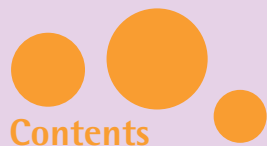
Its joint preparation has meant that we have been able to pool resources, knowledge and explore design solutions to the problems we struggle with in different parts of Rochdale and Oldham. The draft guidance is now out for consultation and we would welcome your views on its content, usability and appearance. We want to get it right, so tell us if we've missed an opportunity or got it wrong. We want this to be your guidance, not just ours.

Councillor Hibbert
Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council



This guide is a great example of how Councils and their partner agencies can work together to ensure that through quality design we can protect and improve our towns and villages. We have listened to what all the stakeholders have said and we have focussed on those areas where design guidance can make a real difference, i.e. the design of new residential development and the public realm. With this guide we aim to bring in a local agenda that protects, enhances and sustains local communities and their distinct characters. The design guidance provides us with a vital tool to help developers and investors deliver what our local communities want and it will allow Planning Officers and Planning Committees to judge applications against the principles set out in this guidance.

Councillor Hobhouse
Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council



Contents

"High standards of urban design should be promoted everywhere. People who live in low quality environments should be as entitled as anyone else to expect high standards for new development... poor designs are unacceptable wherever they may be proposed"

Design Review, CABE 2002

Introduction i

Basis for Urban Design Guidance ii

The Urban Design Principles vi

1 Character 1

2 Safety and inclusion 5

3 Diversity 9

4 Ease of movement 13

5 Legibility 17

6 Adaptability 21

7 Sustainability 25

8 Good streets and spaces 29

9 Good sustainable buildings 35

10 Designing for future maintenance 41

Appendices 45

Appendix A: Planning Policy Sources 47

Appendix B: Glossary 51

Appendix C: References 53





Introduction

Urban design is about creating quality of life, vitality and places where people want to live, work and play



Introduction

Good urban design and well designed buildings and spaces are no longer luxuries. They are essentials, and are required by national planning policies and the local policies of Oldham and Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Councils.

This Urban Design Guide expands on local planning policies and sets design principles for *all* types of development with the Boroughs of Oldham and Rochdale. These principles identify *what* development should do to achieve design quality. The following guides provide more detail on *how* the principles set out in this Urban Design Guide should be achieved:

- the Residential Design Guide;
- the Public Realm Design Guide; and
- the Design and Planning Process: Guide to Good Practice.

The Boroughs of Rochdale and Oldham intend to adopt the series of urban design guides as Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD). The guides will therefore be a material consideration in determining planning applications, and should be read by developers and their design teams. This formal adoption process requires consultation with



Diagram showing how the Design Guides relate to local planning policy

local stakeholders, and this document is a Draft for Consultation. It may be amended in response to consultation before being adopted by the two Boroughs.

This Guide aims to encourage high quality design of places, buildings and landscapes that meet the current and future needs of the communities that use them. The basis for this Urban Design Guide has been set by:

- national planning policy;
- local planning policy;
- consultation with key stakeholders; and
- analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the urban forms and landscapes within Oldham and Rochdale

The table in Appendix A sets out the planning policies that the principles in this Guide support.

Appendix B provides a glossary of urban design terms, and Appendix C sets out references to other source material.

The content of the Urban Design Guide has been shaped by the consultation held between March and September 2005. These interviews, workshops and review sessions provided valuable insights into local perceptions of key issues and options for the guidance.

The key issues discussed during consultation included:

- what is considered good and bad urban design in various parts of both Boroughs;
- the causes of poor environmental quality; and
- good and poor practice encountered in promoting good urban design, designing schemes, and assessing the merits of planning applications.

The options for the guidance focused on:

- the issues and themes that urban design guidance specifically for Oldham and Rochdale should address; and
- the priorities to be included in core urban design principles that should inform this Guide.

There are four overall aims that are essential to creating successful places. These underpin the principles within this Guide and are:

1. The need for sustainable development that is environmentally responsible, and:

- minimises consumption of finite and non-renewable resources;
- reduces or eliminates harmful emissions; and
- conserves and improves valuable and valued parts of the historic built and natural environment.

While the planning system has a key role to play in delivering better design, the creation of successful places depends on the skills of designers and the vision and commitment of those who employ them'

By Design

Planning policies should promote high-quality inclusive design in the layout of new developments and individual buildings in terms of function and impact, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development. Design which fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area should not be accepted.

Planning Policy Statement 1

For places to be well-used and well-loved, they must be safe, comfortable, varied and attractive. They also need to be distinctive and offer variety, choice and fun.

Urban Design Compendium

Introduction

2. The need for community development that provides for a greater sense of involvement in planning and development processes, and:

- supports cultural diversity, social interaction and cohesion; and
- engenders civic pride and a sense of ownership of peoples' immediate and wider environments.

3. The need for inclusive and safe development that is as accessible as possible to all, and:

- maximises choice and opportunity;
- minimises opportunities for crime and anti-social behaviour; and
- feels safe.

4. The need for attractive development that is fit-for-purpose and:

- is aesthetically pleasing;
- relates positively to its context; and
- enhances its surroundings.

Sound planning policies and clear design guidance are by themselves no guarantee that high quality places will be created and maintained. Achieving good urban design needs to be supported by good processes. There are four processes involved in

creating places: design solutions; applications and approvals; implementation; and maintenance.

1. Design Solutions, which requires ongoing commitment to improving design quality on the part of all participants. This includes developers and their design teams, the local planning and highway authorities, other public agencies, councillors and decision makers, and local communities. The design team must have the right skills to be able to use the Urban Design Guide to inform their designs.

To be successful, the process of developing design solutions should include consultation with key stakeholders doing the design process (and not just after the design has been finalised) and pre-application discussions with the local authority.

2. Applications And Approvals, which requires the right skills in both the design team and the local authority to ensure that good quality applications are submitted and good quality decisions are made.

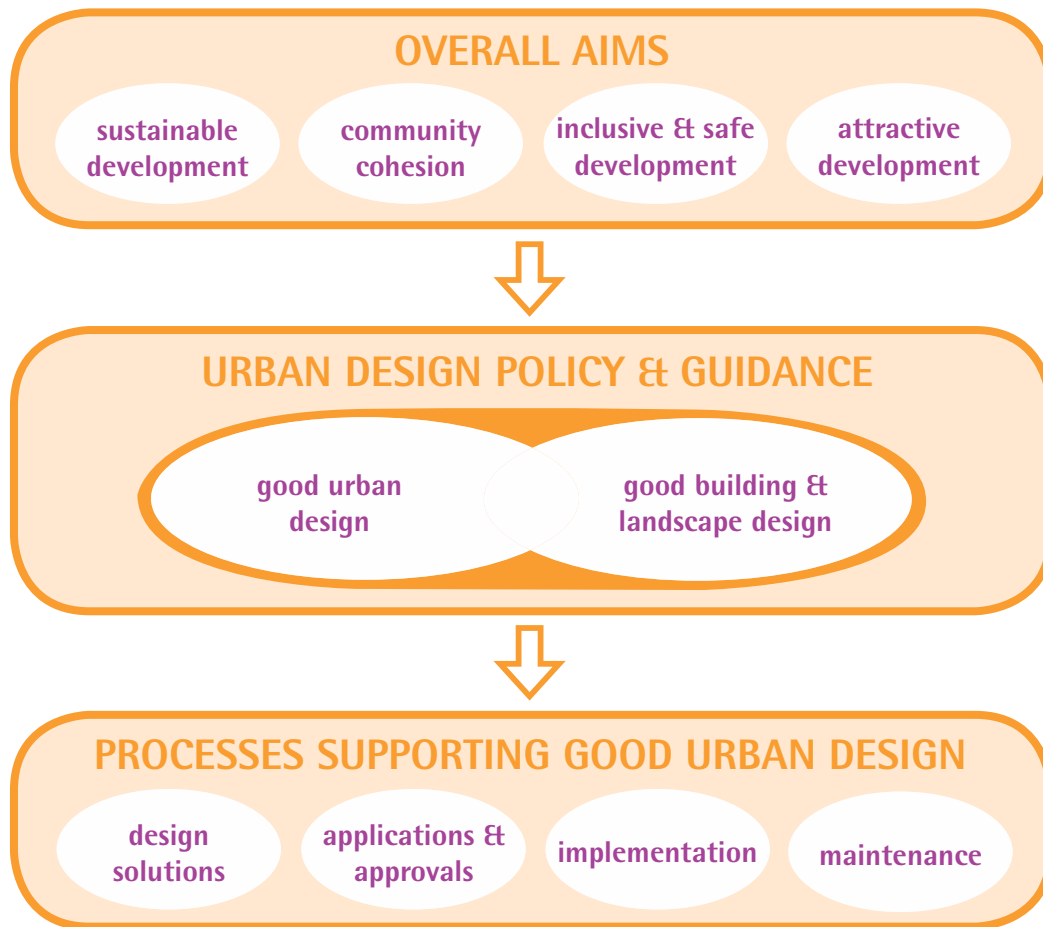
The Design and Planning Process: A Guide To Good Practice is a useful reference.

3. Implementation, which includes considerations of:

- the practicality of the proposals;
- how development is to be built out over time;
- the requirements of agencies such as highways and statutory undertakers; and
- the need to minimise adverse impacts on the environment and local communities during construction.

4. Maintenance, Good design can only be successful if it lasts. Spaces and buildings that are difficult or expensive to maintain will not achieve good design. No matter how well designed initially, buildings and spaces that use materials with a short life will not achieve good design. The principles within this Guide are underpinned by the aims of (i) ensuring that durable, sustainable and replaceable materials and components are used for construction; (ii) appropriate provision is made for maintaining the development to ensure that the quality of the Boroughs is sustained over time; and (iii) actively involving the agencies responsible for maintenance in the design process.

The diagram below illustrates how design policies and the guidelines set out in this and other Guides relate to the four over-arching themes and the four processes in creating successful places for sustainable communities.



Introduction

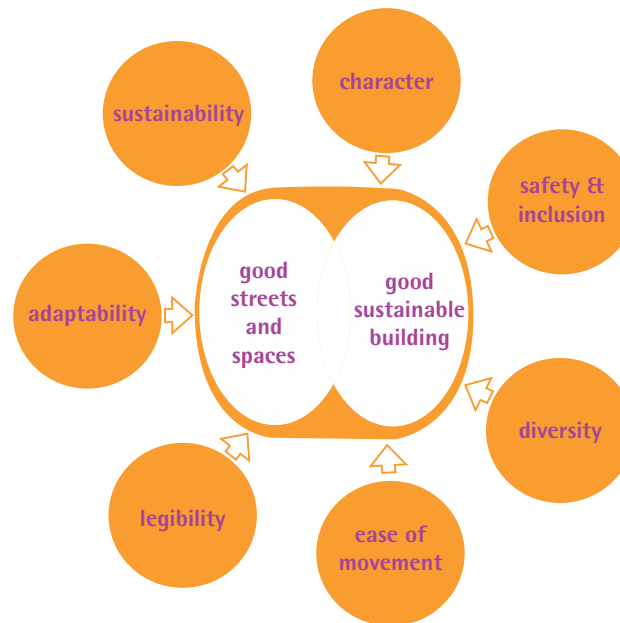
The Urban Design Principles

The ten urban design principles set out opposite are drawn from local and national planning policy and best practice guidance, analysis of the local area – and most importantly – consultation with local people.

These principles may seem very general. However, towns and cities throughout England tend to have similar problems and share similar aspirations about the type of place they would like to become: thus, the urban design principles reflect common themes.

The aim of this Design Guide is not only to raise the quality of individual developments, but also to improve the image of Oldham and Rochdale as distinctive places. Thus the principle of character – enhancing identity and sense of place – leads the nine principles.

The first seven principles encapsulate the urban design qualities that contribute to making good places, buildings, spaces and landscape. The last two principles concentrate on where the first seven need to work together: streets and spaces; and buildings.



The principles

- **Character**
enhancing identity and sense of place
- **Safety and inclusion**
ensuring places are safe, secure and welcoming for all
- **Diversity**
providing variety and choice
- **Ease of movement**
ensuring places are easy to get to and move through
- **Legibility**
ensuring places can be easily understood
- **Adaptability**
anticipating the need for change
- **Sustainability**
minimising the impact on our environment
- **Good streets and spaces**
creating places with attractive outdoor places
- **Good sustainable buildings**
constructing environmentally friendly buildings
- **Designing for future maintenance**
designing buildings and spaces so that their quality can be maintained over time

1. Character

Enhancing identity and sense of place



Why is character important?

Oldham and Rochdale have a rich history, and this is demonstrated in many of its buildings and spaces.

However, most recent development does not have much to do with Oldham and Rochdale. It could be anywhere in the UK. At its best it has a bland feel, at worst new development turns its back on its surroundings and ignores what is around it. To transform the quality of the two boroughs, new development must create a positive character, with an identity that relates to the specific characteristic of Oldham and Rochdale.

1. Character

1a Development must respond positively to its context. It should:

- where the local context is positive, new development should reflect local urban design characteristics. These should include street pattern, building scale and form, proportion and fenestration patterns, so creating an appropriate density, layout and building design that further improves the qualities of the local area;
- where the local context has a weak or negative character, new development must improve the quality of the area. It may do this by introducing new street patterns and building forms to create a distinctive new identity;
- all new development should propose uses that are appropriate to the wider area;
- all new development should relate positively to the topography, landscape and other features (such as canals) of the wider area, and respond positively to views towards the site;
- all new development should respect and enhance the setting of archaeological features, listed and heritage buildings, and conservation areas; and
- all new development should contribute to the cultural and historic qualities of the surrounding area.



Typical Pennine Village Street: tightly enclosed by buildings but with views to the surrounding countryside



The layout of Pennine villages relates to the local topography



Typical inner-city layout: a distinctive regular geometric grid 'draped' over the hills of Oldham and Rochdale



Mills are an important part of the character of Oldham and Rochdale



More recent suburban layout: could be anywhere in England



Above: Where the surrounding area has positive characteristics, developers should make the most of the opportunity to reinforce them through new buildings and spaces.



Where the surrounding area has few positive characteristics, there is an opportunity for new development to improve the appearance and character of the site and its context.

1b Development must respond positively to its site and contribute to a distinctive sense of place. It should:

- use the topography and orientation of the site to enhance local distinctiveness;
- retain and incorporate existing natural and landscape features of ecological, environmental, amenity or cultural value (e.g. mature trees, planting, streams, ponds, hedgerows, greens, commons);
- retain and enhance archaeological features, listed buildings, historic parks and gardens, and buildings and features of cultural, historic, industrial heritage and/or townscape merit;
- remove unattractive or inappropriate buildings, elements or features that detract from the quality and/or character of the site and its surroundings;
- incorporate where possible and appropriate new, well designed publicly accessible open spaces, landmark elements, landscape, lighting features and public art; and
- ensure that new development will positively improve the appearance and character of the site in its setting, creating a new quality benchmark for further development in the immediate locality. This is particularly important where the existing site and context are of poor visual or environmental quality or are weak and lacking in character.



The conversion of this mill to offices will result in a positive frontage to the canal



Further along the canal the blank wall presents a negative edge to the canal

2. Safety and inclusion

Ensuring places are safe, secure and welcoming



Why are safety and inclusion important?

This Urban Design Guide has been informed by discussions with many people in Rochdale and Oldham. In response to the question 'What makes a good place?', there was overwhelming agreement that a good place must be a safe place that is accessible for all.

Residents must feel safe and secure in their homes, visitors must feel that places are welcoming, and businesses must be able to operate in a safe and secure environment.

2. Safety and inclusion

2a Development must positively contribute to making routes, streets and public spaces as safe, free from crime and accessible as possible. It should:

- ensure all routes and open spaces are well overlooked by building fronts;
- design buildings so that windows and doors face onto streets and spaces, avoiding long blank walls;
- avoid segregating pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles;
- ensure there are clear, direct and well-lit routes and paths between key destinations, with clear forward visibility and gentle changes of direction, avoiding places hidden from view or in darkness;
- concentrate activity and footfall along a network of pedestrian-friendly key routes and public spaces so that these can be "self-policing";
- ensure that there are alternatives to leisure routes through parks, open spaces or less well used streets, so that they can be avoided by those wishing to do so;
- limit vehicular speeds on streets to provide a safer environment for pedestrians and cyclists;
- ensure that routes, streets and public spaces and access to buildings from them are designed to be accessible to all, including children, the elderly, those with some form of impairment, and those carrying shopping or pushing a pushchair;
- ensure that pedestrian routes remain free from obstructions and unintended hazards that would restrict accessibility (e.g. uneven pavements, temporary barriers, and inappropriate resurfacing prior to, during or after construction and maintenance works); and
- support the on-going supervision, maintenance and management of routes, streets and open spaces to deter vandalism and antisocial behaviour, engender a sense of community pride and ensure they remain safe, accessible and attractive.



Routes must be clear, direct and well lit so that they are safe at all times





Large floorplate uses such as supermarkets must be designed to minimise blank elevations to public space.

2b Development must minimise opportunities for car and cycle theft, vandalism or assault or harassment of car-users or cyclists. It should:

- ensure public car parks and secure cycle parking areas are accessible and well-lit, with secure and visible entrances and exits;
- incorporate any private parking spaces required within secure premises or where they can be seen by car or cycle users or the occupants of the buildings they serve; and
- ensure that parking areas and accesses to them are overlooked and not obscured by buildings or planting that could provide potential hiding places.

2c Development must minimise opportunities for crime against property and the occupants of buildings without detracting from the quality of the townscape and landscape. It should:

- involve consultation with the local police Architectural Liaison Officer as part of the design process;
- provide a clear distinction between the publicly accessible streets and space and private space associated with individual buildings and groups of buildings;
- minimise opportunities for unauthorised access to private gardens, courtyards or other spaces by enclosing these with buildings where possible or secure walls or fences;
- ensure that the entrances to private spaces or buildings are secure and clearly visible from both the street and windows within buildings;
- ensure that boundaries to front gardens or forecourts do not create hiding places;
- avoid incorporating service roads, maintenance strips or private paths that are not overlooked
- or provide access to openable ground floor windows;
- balance the aim of well connected routes (permeability) against the need to minimise escape routes for criminals, whether on foot and in cars;
- ensure that the incorporation of permanent or temporary security measures to prevent break-ins to premises or ram-raiding of shop fronts, such as grilles, shutter-blinds, bollards and reinforced stall-risers, are integrated into the design of buildings and do not present unattractive, blank elements in the street scene; and
- provide for the incorporation of CCTV for the surveillance of those parts of the public realm and private space and buildings that require it or would benefit from it to discourage crime and anti-social behaviour.



Back along public streets invite vandalism and create a poor street scene



Consistent boundary treatment clearly defines private and public space



