

Oldham

Local Plan

Draft Local Plan: Design Topic
Paper

December 2023



Oldham
Council

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1. Introduction and Purpose

- 1.1. This is the Creating a Better & Beautiful Topic Paper and is one of ten topic papers produced to inform the consultation on the Oldham Local Plan: Draft Plan.
- 1.2. All of the papers can be found on the [Oldham Council website](#)¹.
- 1.3. The topic papers set out how the preferred option for each policy under the relevant Draft Local Plan 'Chapter' has been developed. As such, the topic papers support and complement the Draft Plan consultation document as they provide a detailed explanation of the basis for each preferred policy approach. The policies are presented in a consistent format in each paper with sufficient information to provide a comprehensive appreciation of the background to, and development of, the preferred option.
- 1.4. The topic papers set out the national, regional and local planning context and then for each policy, or group of policies where relevant, the topic paper details how comments received to the Issues and Options consultation and relevant evidence have helped to shape the proposed policy approach. Including how this has also been informed by the findings of the Integrated Assessment. There are also details of further work that may be required to inform the next stage of the plan-making process – the Regulation 19 Publication Plan.
- 1.5. The preparation of a Local Plan must be informed by consultation and engagement as well as statutory processes, such as Integrated assessment and Habitats Regulations Assessment, and address the requirements of national planning policy. These important elements of plan-making have, therefore, informed development of the Draft Local Plan and helped to shape the proposed policy approach. These supporting documents are available to view on the [Oldham Council website](#).

2. Context

- 2.1. This section sets out the key national planning policies that relate to the Creating a Better and Beautiful Oldham chapter, which contains policies around design and which have informed the policy approach taken. It also looks at the regional context – in the main this is the Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan, however there may be other policies and programme of relevance, and local policies and programmes in particular how the policy or policies will help to Create a Better Place.

National

- 2.2. [National Planning Policy Framework](#)²(2023) (NPPF) Section 12 Paragraph 132, requires plans to set out a clear design vision.

¹ Available at: https://www.oldham.gov.uk/info/201233/local_plan_review/3095/draft_local_plan

² This document can be accessed at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework/12-achieving-well-designed-places>

- 2.3. Paragraph 131 states that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creating better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities. Being clear about design expectations, and how these will be tested.
- 2.4. Paragraph 132 identifies the importance of understanding and defining the characteristics of different areas and using these to identify the special qualities that should be reflected in development. Such an approach requires a sound understanding and evaluation of context including physical and socio-economic matters.
- 2.5. Paragraph 11a expands on the notion of sustainable development, which is understood as the promotion a sustainable pattern of development that seeks to: meet the development needs of their area; align growth and infrastructure; improve the environment; mitigate climate change (including by making effective use of land in urban areas) and adapt to its effects.
- 2.6. Design therefore is key to enabling the balance between economic, climate and wellbeing objectives. Paragraphs 131-141 of the NPPF set out a clear national policy framework for promoting good design as a key element to achieving sustainable development and emphasises the indivisible link between good design and good planning.
- 2.7. Paragraph 139 states that development that is not well designed should be refused, especially where it fails to reflect local design policies and government guidance on design, and Paragraph 137 underlines that design quality should be considered throughout the evolution and assessment of individual proposals.

National Planning Practice Guidance

- 2.8. Policies in the NPPF are supplemented by [Planning Practice Guidance](#)³ (PPG) Policies in the NPPF are supplemented by the National Planning Practice that provides further guidance on the interpretation and implementation of achieving good design as set out in the NPPF. The guidance on design states local authorities should make design a more transparent and accessible part of the planning process through clear strategic and non-strategic policies in Local Plans and robust provisions for design review and community engagement.
- 2.9. PPG recognises that ‘non-strategic policies are important for providing a clear indication of the types of development that will be allowed in an area, especially where they provide a hook for more detailed local design guides, masterplans or codes. They can also set out how other design tools are expected to be used in appropriate circumstances, such as design review. (Paragraph: 004 Reference ID: 26-004-20191001 Revision date: 01 10 2019)

³ This guidance can be accessed at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/design>

National Design Guide, Planning practice guidance for beautiful, enduring and successful places (DLUHC, 2019)

2.10. The [National Design Guide](#)⁴ is a planning practice guide from the Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). It builds on the NPPF that references it at Paragraph 133 and makes it clear that creating high quality buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. The focus of the guide is on good design in the planning system and is aimed at local authority planning officers, to inform development proposals and their assessment by Local Planning Authorities (LPAs), it supports Paragraph 139 of the NPPF which states that permission should be refused for development of poor design. The guide applies to all scales of development and new infrastructure.

2.11. The National Design Guide sets out 10 Characteristics of good design, listed below, and seen in the figure below.

- Context – enhances the surroundings.
- Identity – attractive and distinctive.
- Built form – a coherent pattern of development.
- Movement – accessible and easy to move around.
- Nature – enhanced and optimised.
- Public spaces – safe, social and inclusive.
- Uses – mixed and integrated.
- Homes and buildings – functional, healthy and sustainable.
- Resources – efficient and resilient.
- Lifespan – made to last



Figure 1: MHCLG 10 Characteristics of Good Design

National Model Design Code (DLUHC, 2021)

[The National Model Design Code](#)⁵ sets a baseline standard of quality and practice which LPAs are expected to take into account when developing local design codes and guides and when determining planning applications, including:

- The layout of new development, including street pattern
- How landscaping should be approached including the importance of streets being tree-lined
- The factors to be considered when determining whether façades of buildings are of sufficiently high quality

⁴ This document can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-design-guide>

⁵ This document can be accessed at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-model-design-code>

- The environmental performance of place and buildings, ensuring they contribute to net zero targets
- That developments should clearly take account of local vernacular and heritage, architecture and materials.

Regional

Places for Everyone (GMCA, 2022)

- 2.12. [Places for Everyone: A Joint Development Plan Document of Nine Greater Manchester Districts](#)⁶ is being jointly prepared, following Stockport's decision to withdraw in late 2020. The nine local Greater Manchester districts agreed that to address strategic matters such as housing need and economic growth as well as issues such as flood risk and strategic infrastructure, it would be best to work on a joint development plan.
- 2.13. Once Places for Everyone is adopted, all nine Local Plans will be required to be in general conformity with it. As the proposed Places for Everyone evolves, strategic policies can be reflected in draft Local Plans.
- 2.14. The key relevant policies are set out below. Please see Places for Everyone for full policy wording.
- 2.15. **Policy JP-S1 'Sustainable Development'** states development should aim to maximise its economic, social and environmental benefits simultaneously, minimise its adverse impacts, utilise sustainable construction techniques and actively seek opportunities to secure net gains across each of the different objectives.
- 2.16. **Policy JP-G1 'Landscape Character'** states development should reflect and respond to the special qualities and sensitivities of the key landscape characteristics of its location, including having regard to issues such as land use and field patterns and archaeology and cultural heritage.
- 2.17. **Policy JP-P1 'Sustainable Places'** states we aim to become one of the most liveable city regions in the world, consisting of a series of beautiful, healthy and varied places, each having key attributes that all development, wherever appropriate, should be consistent with.

Local

- 2.20. The Oldham Plan '[Our Future Oldham - A shared vision for 2030](#)'⁷ (Oldham Partnership, 2023) prepared by the Oldham Partnership, sets the direction for the borough. With a focus on 'residents first', the Plan seeks to ensure that residents are at the heart of decision-making.

⁶ This document can be accessed at: <https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/what-we-do/planning-and-housing/places-for-everyone/modifications/modifications-documentation-2023/>

⁷ <https://www.oldham.gov.uk/downloads/file/7589/the-oldham-plan-our-future-oldham>


2.21. Consultation carried out to inform preparation of The Oldham Plan found that residents want services close to home and tailored to meet the specific needs of their community. The contributions emphasise a desire for Oldham to be a clean, green and safe place where public transport allows access to opportunities, activities for young people and communities and where people felt part of the city region.

2.22. The main aim of the Oldham Partnership, through the Plan, is to 'uplift every resident', so that we all have:

- A well-rounded, enriching, life-long education
- The opportunity to get a decent job that pays well and offers security and flexibility
- Quick, cheap and easy transport to every part of the city region
- A home that is affordable, well-maintained and appropriate
- Timely access to vital services to keep people healthy and safe
- A clean, green and healthy environment
- Diverse opportunities to get together, with regular activities to boost physical and mental health and community spirit
- A local area that meets people's needs and makes them proud

Oldham Council Corporate Plan

2.23. The Oldham Council [Corporate Plan 2022-27](#)⁸ sets out the council's priorities, with specific actions for 2022-25. It works in parallel with The Oldham Plan and sets out what its priorities mean for Oldham:

- 
- Healthy, safe and well supported residents
 - A great start and skills for life
 - Better jobs and dynamic businesses
 - Quality homes for everyone
 - A clean and green future

2.24. Delivering against these priorities means that the council can help residents and make Oldham the best place it can be.

Creating a Better Place

2.25. The Local Plan represents the spatial expression of The Oldham Plan and the council's Corporate Plan. Their aspirations and priorities are the golden thread that runs through the Plan, along with supporting and facilitating the delivery of the council's ambitious Creating a Better Place agenda which is embedded into the planning framework provided through the policies as illustrated in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Flow diagram illustrating how the council's Creating a Better Place agenda has been embedded into the planning framework

⁸ https://www.oldham.gov.uk/downloads/file/7405/oldham_corporate_plan_2022-27



- 2.26. Through delivering Oldham Council's bold vision for Oldham Town Centre and the wider borough and the ambitions of Creating a Better Place by 2030 Oldham we be a place where business and enterprise can thrive and where people will want to live, visit, relax and work.
- 2.27. Building on its industrial heritage, civic pride and location as a gateway into the countryside, Oldham will have a sustainable future in a unique urban setting. Oldham will be a stronger economic contributor to Greater Manchester, providing a place where every resident is enabled to contribute to and benefit from the continued growth of the city region.
- 2.28. Underneath the overarching theme of Creating a Better Place there sits several key issues that policies within the Local Plan seek to address such as the creation of healthy communities and tackling the climate emergency.
- 2.29. The policies set out within the Local Plan also provide a robust framework for ensuring that all development proposals mitigate the impact of climate change, make their contribution to meeting nationally binding targets to reduce greenhouse emissions and increase resilience.

Oldham and Rochdale Urban Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (Oldham Council and Rochdale Council, 2007)

2.18. The Urban Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) has been jointly prepared by Rochdale Council and Oldham Council to support the development plans and provide a basis for achieving high standards and good quality design throughout the borough. It expands on local planning policies of the Joint DPD and sets design principles for development.

2.19. The Urban Design Principles set out within the Guide are:

- Character - Enhancing identity and sense of place. Development must respond to its context and contribute to a distinctive sense of place.
- Safety and inclusion - Ensuring places are safe, secure and welcoming for all. Development must positively contribute to making places accessible, safe and must minimise opportunities for crime and disorder.
- Diversity - Providing variety and choice. Development must incorporate a mix of uses, provide for the needs of all sections of society and add richness to the social and cultural diversity of the local area.
- Ease of movement - Ensuring places are easy to get to and move through.
- Development must provide clear networks of routes to an area, be located to support non-car travel between people and facilities and give priority to pedestrians and encourage a reduction in reliance on the car.
- Legibility - Ensuring places can be easily understood. Development should contribute to a clear, legible environment that has a clear hierarchy of routes, spaces and functions. It should also relate positively to the visual connections between it and its surroundings.
- Adaptability - Anticipating the need for change. Development proposals and layouts should be adaptable for the changing and future needs of society.
- Sustainability - Minimise the impact on our environment. Development proposals must incorporate measures for reducing energy demands, conserving water resources and flood prevention, make provision for sustainable management of waste and make a positive contribution to supporting biodiversity and greenery.
- Designing for future maintenance - Designing buildings and spaces so that their quality can be effectively maintained over time.
- Good streets and spaces - Creating places with attractive outdoor spaces. Development must make a positive contribution to streets and public spaces in the wider townscape, foster social interaction and support an attractive pedestrian friendly environment.
- Well-designed buildings - Constructing sustainable buildings appropriate to their function and context.

3. Consultation Feedback

Regulation 18 Notification Consultation

- 3.1. To begin preparation of the Local Plan the council carried out a 'Regulation 18' notification between July and August 2017.
- 3.2. To inform this work we asked what the local community and stakeholders thought:
 - a) the Local Plan should contain and what the key planning issues are for Oldham; and
 - b) what, in broad terms, should be the main aims of the Local Plan.
- 3.3. In addition, we published our Integrated Assessment Scoping Report and invited the Environment Agency, Historic England and Natural England to comment on the scope of the Local Plan. This was also available for the local community and stakeholders to view and comment on if they wished.
- 3.4. The main messages that came out of the Regulation 18 Notification consultation regarding design were:
 - There needs to be detailed development management design policies.
 - Design policies should not be overly prescriptive and should not place undue burdens upon development. This is to ensure that development remains viable and industry is able to react to local site and market conditions at the time.
 - The impact of new housing design on traditional homes should be considered. Design needs to be in keeping with what is already established, necessary and appropriate for purpose, considering the aesthetic, functionality, economic and sociopolitical dimensions of the design.
 - There is a need to evaluate and understand the defining characteristics of the borough as part of its evidence base, in order to identify appropriate design policies and design codes, possibly through an Urban Townscape Character Assessment. There is a need to ensure design objectives and policy link strongly to the wider objectives for the future of the area and that they enhance the quality of buildings and spaces.
 - There is the need to ensure that design is inclusive and takes account of an ageing population.
 - There is a need to ensure that Building for Life 12 and the Home Quality Mark is embedded within replacement design policies and any subsequent guidance.
 - There is a need to ensure that the requirements of the National Design Guide are embedded within Local Plan and specific design related policies and any subsequent guidance.

Regulation 18 Issues and Options Consultation

- 3.5. The Oldham Local Plan: Issues and Options consultation in 2021 identified the built environment as one of the key themes for the new Local Plan to address.
- 3.6. The consultation identified key issues relating to:

- How to ensure Oldham can deliver high quality new development
- How to enhance open spaces and public realm
- Ensuring local distinctiveness is maintained and enhanced.

3.7. As part of the consultation, we asked you:

- How do you think we could ensure that new development is as well-designed as possible?
- Do you think Oldham should produce a Local Design Code?
- Should the council make use of a Local Design Review Panel?

3.8. We have reviewed the responses you gave us, and you will find the issues raised in relation to design summarised in this topic paper below.

4. Design and the Draft Local Plan

4.1. Key policy areas have been identified that are addressed in this topic paper. For each of these, further detail is provided on how comments received to the Issues and Options consultation and relevant evidence have helped to shape the proposed policy approach and how this has also been informed by the findings of the Integrated Assessment. There are also details of further work that may be required to inform the next stage of the plan-making process – the Regulation 19 Publication Plan.

5. Policy D1 - A Design Led Approach to Residential and Mixed-Use Development in Oldham, Policy D2 - A Design Led Approach to Non-Residential, Commercial and Employment Developments and Policy - D3 Design Scrutiny

Feedback from Issues and Options consultation

- 5.1. In relation to the design of new dwellings, there were some comments received about ensuring that new design policies do not stifle innovation and that they should be based on a thorough understanding of the areas characteristics.
- 5.2. No specific comments were received in relation to the design of non-residential, commercial and employment developments. However, in general comments on design were supportive, with caveats in relation to ensuring that they are not too stringent in their requirements as it could stifle innovation etc.
- 5.3. Feedback in relation to the use of a Local Design Review Panel was positive, with a number of respondents stating the support for the use of Design Review in the NPPF. In relation to the use of Building for a Healthy Life, whilst there was support for the use of it, there were some responses which stated that an arbitrary target of 12 Greens would not be supported.

Issues to be addressed

- 5.4. There is a need for the Local Plan to provide a positive framework to ensure the buildings and places are well-designed and create a better and more beautiful Oldham.

Evidence Base

Local design quality

5.5. In 2020, a [Housing Design Audit for England](#)⁹ was launched by Place Alliance to provide a systemic approach to assess the design quality of the external residential environment to improve placemaking and enhance the potential for internalisation of trips. It scored new housing developments across England on a variety of metrics under the following broad categories:

- Environment and Community;
- Place Character;
- Streets, Parking and Pedestrian Experience; and
- Detailed Design and Management.

5.6. These were then subdivided into a greater number of metrics. The report found that generally the North West region, where Oldham is located, was delivering poor places below the national average. The report states that 'poor' and even 'mediocre' design is not sustainable and falls foul of the NPPF's 'Presumption in favour of sustainable development'.

5.7. The report stated five recommendations for local authorities to achieve high quality design, which should be taken into account by the Local Plan:

- Set very clear aspirations for sites (in advance)
 - use proactive tools that encompass design aspirations for specific sites to positively influence design quality, as they give greater certainty for housebuilders and communities, and their use and the sorts of design ambitions that they will espouse should be made clear in policy, well in advance of sites coming forward for development.
- Design review for all major housing schemes
 - Local authorities should themselves establish or externally commission a design review panel as a chargeable service and all major housing projects should be subject to a programme of design review.
- Deal once and for all with the highways / planning disconnect
 - Highways design and adoption functions should work in a wholly integrated manner with planning, perhaps through the establishment of multi-disciplinary teams and by involving highways authorities in the commissioning of design review.
- Refuse sub-standard schemes on design grounds

⁹ This document can be found at: <https://indd.adobe.com/view/23366ae1-8f97-455d-896a-1a9934689cd8>

- LPAs need to have the courage of their convictions and set clear local aspirations by refusing schemes that do not meet their published design standards.
- Consider the parts and the whole when delivering quality
 - Some well-designed large schemes are being undermined by a failure to give reserved matters applications adequate scrutiny or through poor phasing strategies resulting in the delivery of disconnected parcels of residence.

Wellbeing as a place function

- 5.8. NHS England launched a [Healthy New Towns](#) ¹⁰ programme in 2015 to explore how the development of new places could provide an opportunity to create healthier and connected communities with integrated and high-quality health services. 10 'demonstrator sites' chosen in March 2016.
- 5.9. This demonstrator towns sought to highlight how it might be possible to respond to England's growing and ageing population, as well as a significant programme of house building planned and underway across the country has created an opportunity to address some of the causes of these inequalities for these communities for generations to come.
- 5.10. The programme captured learnings across all of its demonstrator towns in ten principles, listed below which are intended to provide lessons and clear actions for councils, developers and the NHS.
- Principle 1 Plan ahead collectively
 - Principle 2 Assess local health and care needs and assets
 - Principle 3 Connect, involve and empower people and communities
 - Principle 4 Create compact neighbourhoods
 - Principle 5 Maximise active travel
 - Principle 6 Inspire and enable healthy eating
 - Principle 7 Foster health in homes and buildings
 - Principle 8 Enable healthy play and leisure
 - Principle 9 Develop health services that help people to stay well
 - Principle 10 Create integrated health and wellbeing centres

Design Review Principles and Practice, The Design Council, et al (2019)

- 5.11. Design Review is focused on outcomes for people. It explores how a building or place can better meet the needs of the people who will use it and of everyone who will be affected by it. It does this by constructively endeavouring to improve the quality of architecture, urban design, landscape and highway design.
- 5.12. For Design Review to succeed, it must be carried out using a robust and defensible process, offering consistently high standards in the quality of its advice.

¹⁰ This document can be found at: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/ourwork/innovation/healthy-new-towns/>

- 5.13. There are ten fundamental principles which set out the standards required for a successful Design Review. The principles can be read in the [Design Review Principles and Practice](#)¹¹ document.

Building for a Healthy Life: Building for Life Partnership

- 5.14. [Building for a Healthy Life](#)¹² is a government-endorsed industry standard for well-designed homes and neighbourhoods. Local communities, local authorities and developers are encouraged to use it to guide discussions about creating good places to live. The report asks 12 easy to understand questions that are designed to be used as a way of structuring discussions about a proposed development. Many of these design challenges can induce internalisation of trips through good design.

Proposed Policy Approach and Reasons

- 5.15. The proposed policy direction of policies D1, D2 and D3, as set out in the Draft Plan are as follows:
- 5.16. The policies will require all applicants to demonstrate how their proposals sustain and enhance the unique qualities of Oldham and the subtleties in the different landscape and settlement forms, by utilising a design-led approach. Oldham is a place of varied and subtle character, from the urban core stretching from Manchester, through Failsworth and Chadderton towards Oldham Town Centre towards, the rural landscapes and rolling countryside to the east in Saddleworth. A design-led approach emphasises the central role of design principles and considerations in shaping the development and regeneration of an area. It reflects a commitment to creating well-designed, attractive, and sustainable built environments. In relation to Oldham, the focus of this approach entails:
- **Emphasis on Design Quality:** A design-led approach places a strong emphasis on the quality of the design of buildings, public spaces, and infrastructure. It encourages innovative and thoughtful design that enhances the overall aesthetics of an area.
 - **Community Engagement:** It often involves active engagement with local communities, stakeholders, and architects to gather input and ensure that development proposals align with the community's aspirations and needs.
 - **Sustainability:** Design-led policies frequently prioritise sustainability, encouraging the use of environmentally friendly materials, energy-efficient buildings, and green spaces. It promotes developments that are in harmony with the natural environment.
 - **Contextual Sensitivity:** The approach takes into account the local context, including architectural heritage, local culture, and urban character. New developments should fit harmoniously into the existing urban fabric.
 - **Place-Making:** A design-led approach seeks to create places, not just buildings. It focuses on creating attractive and functional public spaces that foster a sense of community and well-being.

¹¹ This document can be accessed here: <https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/our-resources/archive/reports-resources/10-principles-design-review/>

¹² This document can be accessed here: <https://www.designforhomes.org/project/building-for-life/>

- **Innovation and Creativity:** It encourages innovative and creative design solutions that go beyond the minimum standards to create unique and memorable places.
- **Flexibility and Adaptability:** Design-led policies may also promote flexibility and adaptability in design to accommodate future changes and growth in the community.
- **Design Codes and Guidance:** Local authorities often provide design codes and design guidance to help developers and architects adhere to design-led principles. These documents outline the expectations for design quality and provide specific requirements and recommendations.
- **Design Review Panels:** Some areas have design review panels consisting of experts who assess development proposals against design-led criteria and provide feedback to developers and planning authorities.

5.17. The goal of a design-led approach is to ensure that new development not only meets functional and regulatory requirements but also enhances the overall quality of life in a community. It aims to create places that are not only visually appealing but also sustainable, functional, and resilient, fostering a sense of identity and belonging among residents and visitors. This approach is important for shaping the physical and social fabric of urban and rural areas in Oldham.

5.18. Evidence taken from Design & Access Statements (D&A's) from major applications demonstrate that for the majority of submissions, there is no context as to how the scheme has been developed and the final submission has been led via a design process. The policy aims to ensure that a design-led process is followed, and further guidance will be given in relation to the design-led process will be given in the Oldham Code.

5.19. The design-led policies in this Local Plan, introduce a number of concepts and terms. The policy will require all planning applications to include a comprehensive design and access statement that address the context of an area. Development proposals will be supported that respond to Oldham's communities by:

- **Character** - relates to the distinct and recognisable features and qualities of an area, neighbourhood, or place. It includes the architectural style, historic significance, and visual and functional attributes that make a place unique.
- **Form** - relates to the shape, size, and overall design of buildings and developments. It encompasses the architectural style, massing, and overall aesthetic qualities of structures.
- **Inclusive design** - aims to create environments that are welcoming, accessible, and usable by everyone, regardless of their abilities or disabilities. It's a crucial aspect of creating an equitable and socially inclusive built environment, and it helps ensure that public spaces and facilities are designed to be enjoyed and utilized by a diverse range of people.
- **Layout** - the way in which buildings, open spaces, roads, and other elements are arranged within a development or site. It includes the organization and distribution of various components in a coordinated and efficient manner.
- **Ongoing maintenance** - the regular care, repair, and management required to keep buildings, infrastructure, and public spaces in good working order. It

ensures that the built environment remains safe, attractive, and functional over time.

- Orientation - the positioning of buildings or structures in relation to the sun, wind, and surrounding context. It involves the direction in which a building faces and how it interacts with its environment.
- Outside space - areas of land that are not enclosed within a building but are instead open to the external environment. Outside space can include a variety of open areas, such as gardens, courtyards, public parks, plazas, playgrounds, and other outdoor spaces. These spaces play a significant role in urban and rural planning and development, as they contribute to the quality of life, environmental sustainability, and overall well-being of communities.
- Quality - in the context of planning, refers to the standard of design, construction, and materials used in a development. It assesses the overall excellence of the design and how well the development meets established design and sustainability criteria.
- Usability - the degree to which a building, infrastructure, or space can be easily and efficiently used for its intended purposes. It assesses how well a development or facility meets the needs of its users.

5.20. The proposed approach aims to respond to national policy and the Oldham context to establish a policy that enables good quality design outcomes.

5.21. As set out in the NPPF, design is key to achieving sustainable development, which is described as a contextual response to climate, community, and economic considerations. It is also expected that local authorities are clear as to their expectations for design, and how these will be tested. These stipulations around sustainable development are stated more clearly in the proposed policy's principles - represented by its subheadings - which enable the policy to be applicable across Oldham from its rural villages to its suburban areas and the urban core.

5.22. The approach aims to make it easier for design quality to be upheld throughout the planning process as required by national policy. By splitting the policy into distinct principles requiring developments to respond to the needs of:

- layout, orientation and form;
- quality and character;
- inclusive design;
- outside space; and
- usability and ongoing maintenance.

5.23. These then become indicators of design quality to benchmark the proposal against. These principles can inform all stages of the planning process from pre-application discussions to delivery. In categorising requirements under these principles, the intention of the proposed approach is to ensure the development management process is more transparent so that each party can clearly understand what good design needs to respond to.

5.24. The proposed approach intends to meet national aspirations for design quality and raise local ambitions. As highlighted in a recent audit of design across England, the

region Oldham falls within, North West England, is below the national average. Place Alliance's (2020) [A Housing Design Audit for England](#)¹³, scored the region's design quality of recent schemes as 'poor'. This suggests that while there is some high-quality development being delivered, many schemes are not meeting national or local aspirations for good design.

- 5.25. Policy D1 is justified by adopting a design-led approach that optimises land use, aligning with the foundational principle of sustainable development. It requires applicants to present a Design and Access Statement, ensuring a transparent process and justifiable considerations in scheme development.
- 6.6. In line with the NPPF, Policy D2 aims to ensure these types of non-residential development are designed to be high quality, attractive, and make a positive contribution to the area in which they are located.
- 6.7. As with Policy D1, the policy provides a framework of design principles as considerations to assess the design quality of non-residential development types and provide a strong steer to applicants on key design issues to address. The design principles reflect established objectives of good urban design as also set out in the National Design Guide. These include;
 - accessibility and legibility (M1 and M2 of National Design Guide, page23),
 - continuity and enclosure of streets with active building elevations (B2, page 19),
 - appearance (I2 and I3, page.15-16),
 - well-designed landscaping, servicing and parking (M3, N3, page.24, 28).
- 6.8. These overarching good design objectives are translated into what is hopefully a more helpful and less abstract set of locally defined design principles for the specific types of development covered by Policy D2.
- 6.9. Like the National Design Guide, these principles seek to address common pitfalls in the design of non-residential developments such as; bland 'big box' retail and commercial sheds with little architectural quality, interest or character, poorly sited buildings with a poor relationship to existing street frontages, inactive elevations, parking dominated schemes, poor landscaping, obtrusive servicing areas.
- 6.10. As set out in the NPPF, design is key to achieving sustainable development, which is described as a contextual response to climate, community, and economic considerations. It is also expected that local authorities are clear as to their expectations for design, and how these will be tested. These stipulations around sustainable development are stated more clearly in the proposed policy's principles - represented by its subheadings - which enable the policy to be applicable across Oldham from its rural villages to its suburban areas and the urban core.

¹³ This document can be found at: <https://indd.adobe.com/view/23366ae1-8f97-455d-896a-1a9934689cd8>

- 6.11. The NPPF states that LPAs should ensure that they have access to, and make appropriate use of, tools and processes for assessing and improving the design of development, this includes community engagement, design review, and Building for a Healthy Life which are also referenced in PPG. It encourages early advice to be sought and use of these tools early in the design process.
- 6.12. Policy D3 seeks to clearly set out these tools and the criteria when they should be used, as a formalisation of the existing 'good practice' approach. The introductory paragraph in Policy D3 sets out the process and scale of development to which the requirements will be applied.
- 6.13. As stated above the PPG encourages use of Building for a Healthy Life (BfHL), and the council recognises its use as a valuable and well-established tool in helping secure good design.
- 6.14. In the council's experience BfHL is recognised and accepted by most large house builders and is also one of the very few nationally established and well-known tools available to monitor the quality of new housing developments. As such it has been used by CABI and more recently Place Alliance in recent National Design Quality Audits.

6. Policy D4 Creating Better Views, Gateways and Taller Buildings

Feedback from Issues and Options consultation

- 6.1. Feedback was largely positive in relation to ensuring high quality design, there were no direct comments submitted in relation to tall buildings and creating better views and gateways, although comments were submitted in relation to the impact that density will have on building heights.

Issues to be addressed

- 6.2. As part of our positive approach to making the most efficient use of brownfield land and existing buildings, the policy seeks to establish areas where taller buildings could be developed and where there are important views and panoramas that need to be protected reducing the need for additional pressure on greenfield sites and reducing our carbon footprint. The reuse of mills can add to local distinctiveness as part of place making, attract investment and help retain Oldham's strong identity and culture.
- 6.3. The Mills Strategy called for an assessment of important views and panorama's in relation to the existing Mills and Mill Clusters.

Evidence Base

- 6.4. The policy expands on the NPPF and the [Mills Strategy](#)¹⁴ to provide clarity on assessing development proposals which impact on important views, establishing

¹⁴ This document can be accessed here:

https://www.oldham.gov.uk/info/201236/evidence/2819/oldham_mills_strategy#:~:text=The%20Oldham%20Mills%20Strategy%20identifies,residential%2C%20employment%20and%20other%20uses.

important views and panorama's in relation to Mills and Mill Clusters and establishing set of criteria for tall buildings to be assessed against.

Historic England, Dec 2015. Tall Buildings Advice Note 4

- 6.5. This [Historic England Advice Note](#)¹⁵ provides guidance on planning for and designing tall buildings so that they may be delivered in a sustainable and successful way through the development plan and development management process.
- 6.6. The advice note focuses on how the value of heritage assets may be affected, and how the heritage conservation objectives within legislation and national policy can best be achieved.

Proposed Policy Approach and Reasons

- 6.7. The policy aims to support development that respects and improves the character, image, and legibility of the borough, particularly along main transport corridors and key gateway locations. This is grounded in the aspiration to create an aesthetically pleasing and visually coherent urban environment that reflects the unique identity of Oldham.
- 6.8. Requiring an exceptional standard of design quality, including landmark or taller buildings and public art at key gateway locations, aligns with the goal of enhancing the visual identity and distinctiveness of these important areas. This approach recognises the potential of iconic structures to contribute positively to the borough's skyline and image.
- 6.9. The policy emphasises that tall buildings must incorporate architectural and urban design principles to ensure visual harmony with the surrounding environment. The requirement for outstanding and unique design quality reinforces the commitment to elevating the overall visual appeal and skyline of Oldham.
- 6.10. Criteria are established to prevent tall building developments from obstructing or significantly impacting important views, vistas, and panoramas. The policy underscores the importance of respecting and preserving the town's historical character and aesthetic qualities, safeguarding significant heritage assets from adverse effects.
- 6.11. The policy stipulates that taller buildings should be strategically located where there is good public transport accessibility.
- 6.12. The policy recognises the cultural and historical significance of existing mill buildings and outlines measures to protect them from adverse development impacts. This is consistent with broader heritage policies (such as Policy HE4) and reflects a commitment to preserving Oldham's industrial heritage.

¹⁵ This document can be accessed here: <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/tall-buildings-advice-note-4>

- 6.13. In cases where new tall buildings are proposed near mill building clusters, the policy emphasises the importance of sympathetic design. This ensures that new developments complement the existing structures, contributing positively to the overall character of the area and respecting its historical context.
- 6.14. The policy encourages tall building developments to promote and facilitate the use of public transportation. By providing convenient access to bus stops, tram stations, and railway stations, the policy supports sustainable transportation modes, aligning with broader environmental and urban planning goals.
- 6.15. All tall buildings are required to adhere to sustainability standards and incorporate energy-efficient features, renewable energy sources, and green infrastructure. This commitment to environmental responsibility aligns with contemporary standards and aims to reduce the overall environmental impact of tall building developments in Oldham.
- 6.16. Policy D4 emphasises the importance of development that respects and enhances the character and image of the borough, particularly in key gateway locations and along main transport corridors. It seeks to achieve an exceptional standard of design quality, promoting taller and landmark buildings that positively contribute to the skyline and image of Oldham.
- 6.17. The policy aligns with the NPPF's principle of making effective use of land by supporting development that enhances the character and image of the borough, especially in key gateway locations.
- 6.18. The policy adheres to design principles outlined in Paragraph 135 by emphasising architectural and urban design that ensures visual harmony with the surrounding environment, considering local materials, building heights, and setbacks.
- 6.19. While not directly related to Green Belt, the policy supports broader NPPF principles by protecting clusters of mill buildings with historical or cultural significance and ensuring that new developments are sympathetic to the surrounding historical context.
- 6.20. Policy D4 positively contributes to planning objectives by supporting development that improves the character, image, and legibility of the borough. Promoting an exceptional standard of design quality for buildings, spaces, and environmental improvements, including landmark or taller buildings and public art and safeguarding clusters of existing mill buildings with historical or cultural significance and ensuring new developments are sympathetic to the historical context.
- 6.21. The policy establishes clear criteria for the development of taller buildings, ensuring they do not obstruct important views, harm heritage assets, or negatively impact the town's historical character. Requiring adherence to sustainability standards and energy-efficient features enhances the environmental effectiveness of tall buildings.

7. Policy D5 Improving the Quality of Advertisements and Signage in Oldham

Feedback from Issues and Options consultation

Feedback was largely positive in relation to ensuring high quality design, there were no direct comments submitted in relation to the design of advertisements.

Issues to be addressed

- 7.1. There is a need to set clear criteria to enable adverts to be placed in the right places without detriment to the amenity of the surrounding area as outlined in para 141 of the NPPF. It is important to ensure the benefits of displaying advertisements whilst protecting the built and natural environment and public health and safety.
- 7.2. The borough has a mixture of different places from town centres to rural communities and countryside. The type of advertisements prevalent in these areas can vary greatly but often the concerns remain the same, to protect visual amenity and highway safety. However, there are also key differences between what may be accepted in a town centre and what will be appropriate in a rural settlement. Applicants should be aware of this when considering aspects such as scale and illumination.
- 7.3. Where advertisements are displayed on buildings, they should complement the facade and must not obscure architectural features.

Evidence Base

- 7.4. The [Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan \(CAAMP\) Supplementary Planning Document](#)¹⁶ was adopted in August 2019 for Oldham Town Centre. The Management Plan followed on from the appraisal of the conservation area. It sets out policies and recommendations around enhancement. The Management Plan recommends the council:
 - Improve signage and shopfronts in the Town Centre.
- 7.5. It is considered that this approach can be replicated across the borough and in other conservation areas in Oldham.
- 7.6. Additionally the policy provides further clarification on signage and advertisements, in line with the NPPF and planning guidance.

Proposed Policy Approach and Reasons

- 7.7. The policy underscores the importance of well-designed advertisements and signage that are appropriate for the character and appearance of the area. This approach is essential to maintaining the visual harmony and aesthetic integrity of Oldham, ensuring that signage complements rather than detracts from the surroundings.

¹⁶ The CAAMP SPD can be found at:
https://www.oldham.gov.uk/downloads/download/1599/oldham_town_centre_conservation_area_appraisal_and_management_plan_caamp_supplementary_planning_document_spd

- 7.8. Supporting advertisements that do not become the dominant feature of any location helps prevent excessive visual clutter and maintains the overall visual balance of the area. This consideration contributes to a more pleasant and cohesive urban environment for residents and visitors alike.
- 7.9. The policy aims to prevent an unsightly proliferation, commercialisation, or clutter of signage in the vicinity. This proactive measure helps preserve the visual character of Oldham and prevents an overabundance of signage that could compromise the aesthetic quality of the public realm.
- 7.10. Ensuring that advertisements do not interfere with footpath or highway safety, cause blockages, contribute to light pollution, or pose other safety hazards aligns with broader goals of maintaining a safe and environmentally conscious urban landscape. This consideration prioritizes the well-being and safety of residents and the general public.
- 7.11. The policy stipulates that advertisements should not have a negative effect on the living conditions of nearby residents. This consideration recognises the potential impact of signage on the quality of life for residents and seeks to mitigate any adverse effects on their living environment.
- 7.12. By ensuring that advertisements do not harm the significance of listed buildings, conservation areas, or other designated heritage assets, the policy aligns with heritage preservation objectives. This protects the cultural and historical fabric of Oldham and contributes to the overall conservation of the borough's heritage assets.
- 7.13. The policy addresses the potential negative impacts of advertisements and signage on various aspects of the urban environment, including visual aesthetics, safety, and heritage preservation. By emphasizing appropriateness, visual harmony, and considerations for safety and heritage assets, the policy responds to the legitimate concerns of residents, businesses, and the broader community.
- 7.14. The policy aligns with broader national planning policies that emphasise the importance of sustainable development, visual amenity, and heritage preservation. National policies highlight the need to balance the promotion of economic interests with environmental and cultural considerations. Policy D5's focus on well-designed signage, visual harmony, and heritage protection is consistent with these principles.
- 7.15. The policy takes a proactive stance in setting clear criteria for the design and management of advertisements and signage. It provides a framework for guiding development in a manner that enhances the quality of the built environment. By articulating specific requirements related to appropriateness, visual impact, safety, and heritage, the policy facilitates positive development outcomes.
- 7.16. The policy provides clear and measurable criteria for the evaluation of advertisements and signage. The emphasis on appropriateness, avoidance of visual dominance, prevention of clutter, safety considerations, and heritage preservation provides a

practical guide for developers, businesses, and local authorities. The clarity of the policy helps streamline decision-making processes and contributes to the overall effectiveness of the planning framework.

8. Policy D6 Creating a Better Public Realm in Oldham

Feedback from Issues and Options consultation

- 8.1. Feedback was largely positive in relation to ensuring high quality design, there were no direct comments submitted in relation to the design of the public realm.

Issues to be addressed

- 8.2. Improving the public realm in Oldham, or any urban area, involves addressing a variety of issues to create a more vibrant, accessible, and sustainable community. There is a need to enhance the overall aesthetics of public spaces through thoughtful urban design and integrate historical or cultural elements to preserve the borough's heritage and encourage a cohesive architectural style to create a visually appealing environment.
- 8.3. Ensuring that public spaces are accessible to people with disabilities, designing pedestrian-friendly areas to promote walking and cycling and implementing inclusive features for all age groups, ensuring a welcoming environment for everyone are also important issues which need to be addressed.
- 8.4. It is important to increase the presence of green spaces and parks for recreation and environmental benefits, promote sustainable practices, such as the use of eco-friendly materials and energy-efficient infrastructure and implement tree planting initiatives and creating urban forests to enhance the natural environment.
- 8.5. There is a need to address safety concerns through proper lighting, surveillance, and crime prevention measures and implement traffic calming measures to enhance pedestrian safety. Furthermore, there is a need create spaces for community events, markets, and gatherings to foster a sense of belonging and encourage public art and installations to reflect the community's identity.

Evidence Base

NHS 'putting health into place'

- 8.6. NHS guidance '[Putting Health into Place](#)¹⁷: Principles 4-8 Design, Deliver and Manage' identifies principles that should be used to inform the design of new places. Compact walkable forms that are well connected with multifunctional green spaces should influence the form of new places. Compact and connected development can maximise active travel options for people living and working in new places with

¹⁷ This document can be accessed here: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/putting-health-into-place-v4.pdf>

multifunctional spaces enabling community activities and events that the whole community can engage in.

Linking Active Travel and Public Transport to Housing Growth and Planning. 2017. Sustrans

- 8.7. The key messages from the [Linking Active Travel and Public Transport](#)¹⁸ to Housing Growth report are summarised below:
1. Sustainable transport usage will be significantly increased if direct, attractive and safe walking, cycling, and public transport infrastructure are built both within and to connect new developments to existing networks.
 2. The sooner sustainable transport is fully considered within the planning of a new development the more efficient their location, use and value will be.
 3. In order to maximise sustainable travel, it is important to ensure:
 - a) The right transport infrastructure is built into new developments from the outset; and
 - b) New developments are connected to existing sustainable transport networks to enable people to reach their destination.
 4. Walking routes should be coherent, direct, safe, comfortable and attractive.
 5. The provision of safe, direct and attractive cycling routes alongside convenient and secure cycle parking should be provided.
 6. A clear sensible layout with through routes ensuring the permeability of new developments for walking, cycling and public transport routes is essential.
 7. In conjunction with sustainable transport provision, private motor vehicle use should also be managed - for example speed restrictions and parking management.
 8. There are a number of freely accessible tools to help plan and develop the business case for cycling and walking schemes to connect new developments to employment and other services people require access to.
 9. Active travel provision should also integrate with public transport use for longer journeys to enable convenient, attractive sustainable modes from door to door. This needs to include improving access and secure parking infrastructure for bikes.'

LTN 1/20 Cycle Infrastructure Design

- 8.8. [LTN 1/20 Cycle Infrastructure Design](#)¹⁹ was published in July 2020 and provides guidance and good practice for the design of cycle infrastructure which are centred around five core design principles which seek to make networks and routes 'coherent, direct, safe, comfortable and attractive'. The guidance should be applied to all changes associated with highway improvements, new highway construction and new or improved cycle facilities, including those on other rights of way such as bridleways and routes within public open space.

Proposed Policy Approach and Reasons

- 8.9. Requiring well-designed public realm that is safe, accessible, inclusive, and connected to the local and historic context reflects a commitment to enhancing the overall quality of urban spaces. This approach recognizes that public spaces should

¹⁸ This document can be accessed here: <https://www.sustrans.org.uk/media/4491/4491.pdf>

¹⁹ This document can be accessed here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cycle-infrastructure-design-ltn-120>

not only meet functional needs but also contribute positively to the cultural and historical identity of the area.

- 8.10. The policy's consideration of careful lighting design aligns with the goal of minimizing intrusive lighting infrastructure and reducing light pollution. This approach ensures that public spaces remain environmentally friendly, safe, and visually appealing during both daytime and night-time.
- 8.11. The policy prioritises the creation of public realms that encourage active travel and discourage excessive car use. By identifying and catering to priority modes of travel and focusing on desire lines for pedestrians and cyclists, the policy aligns with broader sustainable development goals and promotes healthier transportation choices.
- 8.12. Requiring a functional understanding of how public realms operate throughout different times and seasons demonstrates a nuanced approach to urban planning. This recognizes that vibrant and well-utilized public spaces contribute to the overall liveability and vitality of the community.
- 8.13. The policy emphasises understanding how people use public spaces, identifying deficits in certain activities, and recognising barriers to movement. This user-centric approach ensures that public realms are tailored to meet the diverse needs of the community, promoting inclusivity and accessibility.
- 8.14. Requiring buildings to activate and define the public realm enhances safety and liveliness. This design approach fosters natural surveillance, contributing to a sense of security and creating dynamic and inviting urban environments.
- 8.15. Ensuring appropriate management and maintenance arrangements for the public realm is a proactive measure to guarantee the longevity and usability of these spaces. This approach recognizes that well-maintained public realms contribute to community satisfaction and well-being.
- 8.16. The policy's consideration of shade, shelter, seating, sunlight, and other microclimatic factors demonstrates a commitment to creating comfortable and inviting spaces. This approach encourages people to spend time outdoors, fostering a sense of community and promoting well-being.
- 8.17. The policy's emphasis on avoiding unnecessary street furniture and ensuring that its design complements the space aligns with principles of simplicity and functionality. This approach prevents visual clutter and enhances the overall aesthetic quality of the public realm.
- 8.18. Requiring the creation of an engaging public realm for people of all ages, with opportunities for various activities and social interactions, promotes inclusivity and community cohesion. This approach recognises that public spaces serve as vital community hubs.

- 8.19. The policy's guidelines for on-street parking underscore the importance of design that is not dominant or continuous. By allocating space for green infrastructure and cycle parking, and avoiding obstructions to pedestrian desire lines, the policy supports a balanced and multimodal approach to transportation and urban design.

9. Policy D7 - Development within the curtilage of a dwellinghouse

Feedback from Issues and Options consultation

- 9.1. Feedback was largely positive in relation to ensuring high quality design, there were no direct comments submitted in relation to the design of development within the curtilage of a dwellinghouse.

Issues to be addressed

- 9.2. There is a need to set clear criteria to resist inappropriate development of residential gardens and the subdivision of existing plots. This will be done by reference to a range of factors including potential harm to local character, adequacy of remaining amenity space, trees, heritage and biodiversity. The policy will also seek to stop development that would compromise the potential of other land to be brought forward for development.
- 9.3. In relation to boundary treatments this is considered necessary due to the number of applications in recent years for the paving over of existing front gardens, and the resulting impact this has on biodiversity, surface water flooding.
- 9.4. In relation to extensions, alterations and outbuildings, there is currently a lack of specific policy responses to them in the current Joint DPD.

Evidence Base

- 9.5. Development within the curtilage of a dwellinghouse is not currently monitored by the council. Where development has occurred, these are generally assessed under policies 9 and 20 of the existing Joint DPD.

Proposed Policy Approach and Reasons

- 9.6. The policy emphasises that any extension or alteration should be in harmony with the character and appearance of the original dwelling and the surrounding properties. This is to ensure that the new development does not disrupt the existing visual cohesion of the neighbourhood.
- 9.7. The requirement that the development should not have a significantly adverse effect on the amenities of nearby residential properties is aimed at preserving the quality of life for existing residents and future occupants.
- 9.8. The inclusion of suitable provision for access and parking acknowledges the importance of proper infrastructure to support additional developments, minimising potential issues related to traffic and parking.

- 9.9. The policy recognises the need for special considerations when the building was originally constructed for a non-residential purpose. This ensures that the new development maintains the original character of the building.
- 9.10. The criteria for annexe accommodation focus on its functional dependence on the main dwellinghouse. This is a practical measure to ensure that such accommodations are intended for individuals dependent on the occupants of the main dwelling, reinforcing the policy's commitment to supporting community and family needs.
- 9.11. The criteria for replacement dwellings emphasize the need for compatibility with the existing character of the area and limit the size increase. By ensuring that replacement dwellings align with the scale, character, and appearance of their surroundings, the policy aims to prevent overly dominant or out-of-place structures.
- 9.12. The requirement that boundary treatments and hard surfacing meet the first three criteria for extensions, alterations, and outbuildings/structures reinforces the policy's commitment to maintaining visual harmony and compatibility.
- 9.13. The policy acknowledges the importance of existing soft landscaping and the prevailing character of boundary treatments, emphasising the need to consider these factors when assessing the impacts of proposed developments.
- 9.14. The policy's emphasis on compatibility, amenity impact, and functional dependence supports the delivery of sustainable development by promoting well-designed, community-focused, and environmentally sensitive projects.

10. Integrated Assessment

- 10.1. Policies D1-D7 all scored positively or neutral. No mitigation or enhancements to the policies were required as a result of the IA process. The policies were not screened in by the HRA.

11. Further Work and Next Steps

- 11.1. Between the Draft Plan stage and Publication Plan stage further work will be required on the site allocations to ensure that sites are appropriately screened and where necessary mitigation and / or enhancement is identified to support development sites taken forward for allocation.
- 11.2. This would inform any necessary site-specific criteria for site allocation policies.
- 11.3. Work will be needed to be progressed on The Oldham Code and a borough-wide Townscape Character Assessment in line with the requirements of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023.