

# West Berkshire Local Plan Review 2023-2041 (adopted June 2025)

## Design Quality

### Policy SP7

#### Design Quality

New development will be required to strengthen a sense of place through high quality locally distinctive design and place shaping. This will enable healthy place making, creating places that are better for people, taking opportunities available for conserving and enhancing the character, appearance and quality of an area and the way it functions.

Development proposals will be expected to show how they have responded positively to both national and local design guidance. At a national level this includes the characteristics of a well-designed place as set out in the National Design Guide (2021), or as superseded, and at a local level, this includes neighbourhood plans, design guides or codes and relevant community planning documents that identify the local character and distinctiveness of an area which is valued by local communities.

### Supporting Text

**5.32** A sense of place is about ensuring that development responds in a holistic way. The Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission<sup>(47)</sup> notes that new development should be designed to fit into the life and texture of the place where it occurs and should also aim to be an improvement of that place. It promotes beautiful buildings in beautiful places, where they are also beautifully placed.

**5.33** In that context, the purpose of this policy is to ensure that all new development across West Berkshire is of the highest possible design quality, in line with both national and local design guidance.

**5.34** For new development to comply with the National Design Guide<sup>(48)</sup>: and be of the highest possible design quality, proposals for new development should demonstrate a positive response to the following characteristics of a well-designed place:

- a. Context – Proposals for new development should enhance the surroundings by beginning with an understanding of an area's existing character and context and its design should evolve from West Berkshire's high quality and diverse landscape character and rich built and cultural heritage.
- b. Identity – New development should be attractive and distinctive, complementing and enhancing existing areas, using architectural distinctiveness (through both the quality and choice of construction materials and techniques) and high quality design, to reinforce local identity and to create a sense of place; one that is successful and enjoyed. Architectural design should be appropriate and sympathetic to the setting, in terms of height, massing, scale, proportions, roof form, materials, night and day visibility, elevation, vernacular detailing (where relevant), hard and soft landscaping, curtilage and boundary treatment.
- c. Built form – All forms of development should be designed appropriately in terms of nature, location and scale. When assessing an application consideration will be given to the impact of the scheme taking into account existing approved and proposed development in the same locality and considering the cumulative impact of development over time.
- d. Movement – Proposals will be designed to enhance the way an area functions in practical terms through a mix of land uses, by ensuring the development is well connected, accessible, safe and easy for people to find their way through and around.
- e. Nature – Development will be designed to strengthen green infrastructure in accordance with policy SP10 and should include arrangements for its long term maintenance and management. Design proposals will create habitats and select species that are locally characteristic, taking opportunities to design wildlife habitats into the fabric of buildings and enhance wildlife connectivity in accordance with policy SP11.
- f. Public spaces – A sense of place can be created through a full understanding of how new development contributes to the character of an area and adapting design techniques to create places that feel safe, and secure; places that feel inclusive and people enjoy using; places that promote physical activity, enhance social connections and strengthened mental health; and places that people can identify with and can take pride in or responsibility for their upkeep. Development will be comprehensive at a human scale using gateways, focal points and

47 Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission: <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/building-better-building-beautiful-commission>

48 National Design Guide: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-design-guide>

## West Berkshire Local Plan Review 2023-2041 (adopted June 2025)

landmarks as appropriate. Landscape treatment, street furniture and infrastructure will be of the highest quality and have a clear purpose. Opportunities for the integration of high quality public art will be considered. Opportunities for the planting of trees and other soft landscaping will be maximised.

- g. Uses – New development will help to create more sustainable and socially inclusive places by contributing towards the provision of a mix of uses that support everyday activities including living, working and playing; and by delivering an integrated mix of tenures and housing types.
- h. Homes and buildings – New development should be designed to be functional, healthy and sustainable, and all residential development should comply with the nationally described space standards, as set out in the Technical Housing Standards (2015) or as superseded. New development should provide a high quality of amenity and privacy for occupants of the development and neighbouring properties and land, having regard to overlooking, access to natural sunlight, outlook and amenity space, in line with policy DM30. Development will be designed to provide appropriate open space provision in terms of amount, layout and location in accordance with policy DM40.
- i. Resources – New development should respond positively to the challenge of climate change and be designed for climate resilience, including maximising the efficient use of sustainable technologies, resources, materials, solar gain, in accordance with policy SP5. New development should be designed to include the provision of high quality, secure, accessible and where possible integrated storage for general and recycling waste, heating fuel, and transport related equipment.
- j. Lifespan – New development should be made to last and able to adapt to changing future needs and technologies over time.

**5.35** New waterside development adjacent to the Kennet & Avon Canal should seek to positively address the water, integrate the towing path and open up access to the water, link the waterside space to the water, make use of the water itself, incorporate access improvements, engage with the benefits of being by the water, and reflect the scale of the local waterway to the wider neighbourhood. In accordance with policy SP6, where practicable and appropriate, any development should include an undeveloped buffer zone of 10m on both sides of the Canal.

**5.36** Use of the National Design Guide and other national design guidance, including<sup>(49)</sup> principles will be supplemented through the use of more detailed local design guidance. These currently include the Council's Supplementary Planning Document Quality Design - West Berkshire<sup>(50)</sup>, Conservation Area Appraisals<sup>(51)</sup>, and Shopfronts and Signs Supplementary Planning Guidance<sup>(52)</sup>, and neighbourhood plans<sup>(53)</sup>.

**5.37** The Council also actively encourages the production of non-statutory community planning documents such as town and village design statements<sup>(54)</sup> and parish plans<sup>(55)</sup>. Where they have been adopted or endorsed by the Council, the relevant elements within them will be used to inform and support the policies contained within the Local Plan. Local design guidance can emphasise the unique characteristics which give a particular place its local distinctiveness and also highlight the importance of the richness in detail. Choosing the right materials which are appropriate and sympathetic to the local vernacular, for instance, will greatly help new development to fit harmoniously with its surroundings and ensure that it reflects and respects existing local character.

**5.38** For development which affects the North Wessex Downs National Landscape these documents also include 'Guidance on the Selection and Use of Colour in Development' (2021)<sup>(56)</sup> and a 'A Guide to Good External Lighting' (2021)<sup>(57)</sup> published by the North Wessex Downs National Landscape Partnership.

**5.39** Development proposals should be accompanied by all necessary supporting information. The Council publishes a local list of documents<sup>(58)</sup> that are required as part of planning applications and developers are encouraged to ensure their proposals comply with this list.

49 Secured by Design Secured by Design: <https://www.securedbydesign.com/guidance/design-guides>

50 Quality Design - West Berkshire Supplementary Planning Document: <https://westberks.gov.uk/spd-quality-design>

51 Conservation Area Appraisals: <https://westberks.gov.uk/conservation-area-appraisals>

52 Shopfronts and Signs Supplementary Planning Guidance: <https://www.westberks.gov.uk/spd>

53 Neighbourhood plans: <https://westberks.gov.uk/neighbourhoodplanning>

54 Town and village design statements: <https://westberks.gov.uk/spd>

55 Parish plans: <https://westberks.gov.uk/communityplanning>

56 Guidance on the Selection and Use of Colour in

Development: [https://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/WD\\_guidance\\_screen.pdf](https://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/WD_guidance_screen.pdf)

57 Guide to Good External Lighting: [https://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Lighting\\_Guide\\_07-05\\_MEDRES.pdf](https://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Lighting_Guide_07-05_MEDRES.pdf)

58 Local list of documents: <https://www.westberks.gov.uk/planningforms>