

2. Design Excellence

KEY MESSAGES

Camden is committed to excellence in design and schemes should consider:

- The context of a development and its surrounding area;
- The design of the building itself;
- The use and function of buildings;
- Using good quality sustainable materials;
- Creating well connected public spaces and good quality public realm
- Opportunities for promoting health and well-being
- Opportunities for improving the character and quality of an area

- 2.1 High quality design makes a significant contribution to the success of a development, of a place and the community in which it is located. The design of the built environment affects many things including the way we use spaces and interact with each other, comfort and enjoyment, safety and security, our sense of inclusion and our health and well-being. In addition, high quality design across the borough contributes to achieving, a high-quality, sustainable environment for all in the community to live, work, play and relax.
- 2.2 The purpose of this guidance is to promote design excellence and to outline the ways in which developments can achieve high quality design.
- 2.3 This guidance primarily relates to Camden Local Plan policies D1 Design and D2 Heritage. In accordance with these policies, high quality design and preserving and enhancing Camden's rich heritage should be at the heart of all development in the borough. This guidance provides further information on achieving high quality design. In accordance with Policy D1 of the Camden Local Plan, the Council will resist development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions.



When does this section apply?

- 2.4 This guidance applies to all development, whether involving new build, conversions, refurbishments, extensions or alterations. However, the implications for a proposal will vary greatly depending on the nature of the site, the proposed use, the scale of development, its interaction with surrounding sites, and existing buildings and structures on the site, including listed buildings.
- 2.5 Other sections in this Guidance relate to specific types of developments and relevant design matters, designing safer environments; extensions, including upward extensions; alterations and conversions; heritage; and shopfronts.

Promoting and achieving design excellence

- 2.6 Camden is committed to excellence in design. The Council is working with its partners to promote design excellence and improve public buildings, landscaping, open spaces and the street environment. Camden's commitment to seeking the highest design quality has resulted in a number of developments being recognised both nationally and London wide in design award schemes.
- 2.7 The borough contains many special and unique places, many of which are protected by conservation area status. Local Plan Policy D2 (Heritage) requires development schemes to improve the quality of buildings, landscaping and public spaces and the Council will not approve design which is inappropriate to its context or fails to improve the character of an area.
- 2.8 The Council's commitment to design is promoted through the bi-annual Camden Design Awards which acknowledge high quality and innovative design. We are also a promoter of the national Civic Trust Awards which are awarded to buildings judged to have made a positive cultural, social or economic contribution to the local community. More information on the Civic Trust Awards and the Camden Design Awards can be found at the following links: <https://www.civictrustawards.org.uk/> and at www.camden.gov.uk
- 2.9 In order to achieve high quality design in the borough we require applicants to consider buildings in terms of:
- context
 - height
 - accessibility
 - orientation
 - scale and massing
 - siting
 - functionality and layout
 - detailing
 - materials

These issues apply to all aspects of a development, including buildings and other structures (e.g. substations, refuse or cycle storage), outdoor spaces, landscaping and access points and should be considered at an early stage of design, as these elements are often difficult to change at later stages.



Principles of high-quality design

2.10 Development should seek to achieve these principles of high-quality design:

Context and character	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development should respond positively and sensitively to the existing context • Development should integrate well with the existing character of a place, building and its surroundings
Accessible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Places should be accessible to all and easy to get to and move through (permeable) • Development should connect well with existing places
Legible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New development and places should provide recognizable routes and promote active wayfinding • New development should be legible and enable connectivity and effective movement between sites
Adaptable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development should promote adaptability by being responsive to changing social, technological and economic conditions and community needs

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development should be adaptable to future needs and responsive to use
Liveable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development should be compatible with the surrounding area and be able to accommodate uses that work together and create viable places that respond to local needs • Development should promote health and well-being • Good design should contribute to making places better for people • Good design should create safe environments
Sustainable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development should promote sustainability and efficient resource consumption • Development should make efficient use of the site • Development should make use of good quality durable materials
High quality public realm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public spaces should be designed to be attractive, safe, secure, uncluttered and accessible to all
Safe and secure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developments should enable and support opportunities for passive surveillance • Developments should seek to create a sense of place and community

Understanding and responding to context

2.11 Good design should respond appropriately to the existing context by:

- ensuring the scale of the proposal overall integrates well with the surrounding area
- carefully responding to the scale, massing and height of adjoining buildings, the general pattern of heights in the surrounding area
- positively integrating with and enhancing the character, history, archaeology and nature of existing buildings on the site and other buildings immediately adjacent and in the surrounding area, and any strategic or local views, vistas and landmarks. This is particularly important in conservation areas;
- respecting and sensitively responding to the natural and physical features, both on and off the site. Movement of earth to and from and

the around the site should be minimized to prevent any negative impact.

- Natural features and site constraints to be considered when responding to context include, but are not limited to:
 - slope and topography
 - vegetation
 - biodiversity
 - habitats
 - waterways and drainage
 - wind, sunlight and shade, and
 - local pollutant sources
 - flood risk
 - slope instability
- consider and achieve good connectivity to, from, around and through the site for people using all modes of transport, including pedestrians, cyclists, wheelchair users, those with visual impairments, people with pushchairs, and motorised vehicles.

Urban layout and townscape

2.12 The design of a building and/or groups of buildings should carefully consider accessibility and permeability between the development site and its surroundings:

- new development should be designed to integrate well with the existing surrounding layout to create well connected places and spaces that complement one another
- development should be designed to connect well with existing routes
- development layout should be designed to be flexible and adaptable for future uses
- the layout of places whether new or existing should be designed to respond positively to or improve where possible the prevailing layout
- development form and layout must also be appropriately designed to respond sensitively to the surrounding area with regard to density, scale and massing
- The layout of places whether existing or new should be considered in relation to:
 - Adjoining buildings
 - Streets and spaces
 - The topography
 - The general pattern of building heights in the surrounding area
 - Views
 - Vistas and landmarks into and outside of the development site

Building design: form, function, layout and detailed design

2.13 In addition to considering context, the design of a building and/or groups of buildings should:

- take into account the proposed use, and the needs of the expected occupants of the buildings and other users of the site and development; and
- provide clear indication of the proposed use/s. It is noted, however, that reuse of existing buildings, as well as the accommodation of possible future changes of use, can make this difficult; nevertheless buildings should be designed to be adaptable and flexible.
- take into account both local and London wide strategic views, and particularly where the site is within a recognised strategic viewing corridor (as shown on the Policies Map);
- consider the degree of openness of an area and open spaces, including gardens and views in and out of these spaces
- seek to contribute to the character;
- seek to provide visual interest for onlookers, from all aspects and distances. This will involve attention given to both form and detail;
- consider opportunities for overlooking of the street and, where appropriate, provide windows, doors and other ‘active’ features at ground floor; and
- carefully incorporate external facilities, such as renewable energy installations, access ramps, plant and machinery, waste storage facilities and shading devices into the design of the development. Careful consideration must be given to ensure that the facility does not harm the built environment.

Materials: contextual, durable and sustainable

2.14 Materials should form an integral part of the design process and should:

- Be contextual – the texture, colour, pattern and patina of materials can influence the impact and experience of buildings for users and the wider townscape. The quality of a well-designed building can easily be reduced by the use of poor quality or an unsympathetic palette of materials. Decisions on the materials used in a development scheme should be informed by those used in the local area.
- Respond to existing heritage assets and features by relating to the character and appearance of the area, particularly in conservation areas or within the setting of listed buildings.
- Be durable and fit for purpose – it is important that robust materials that will weather well are used.
- Be sustainable and environmentally friendly. We will encourage the use of re-used and recycled materials where possible and appropriate. Further guidance on the sustainable use of materials is contained within CPG Energy efficiency and adaptation.

Sustainable design

- 2.15 The Council expects development to be sustainable in design and construction:
- Development should seek to be durable and adaptable to reduce resource use over time to include effective layout of infrastructure servicing development.
 - The layout and design of buildings and planting can reduce energy and water use and mitigate against flooding, pollution and over-heating.
 - Development should be durable and robust in construction to enable where appropriate, flexibility and adaptability over time to accommodate a range of uses.
 - Environmentally friendly materials, and well-designed building patterns and/or building forms that facilitate sustainable resource use and enable climate change mitigation are encouraged. Further details can be found in CPG Energy efficiency and adaptation.

Inclusive design

- 2.16 The Council will require that all development in the borough is inclusive and accessible for all:
- Be contextual and respond to existing heritage assets and features by relating to the character and appearance of the area, particularly in conservation areas or within the setting of listed buildings
 - See **CPG Access** for further detailed guidance on achieving development that is inclusive and accessible for all.

Tall buildings

- 2.17 Camden does not allocate areas for tall buildings because of the borough's diverse and rich historical and architectural context. Tall buildings in Camden (i.e. those which are substantially taller than their neighbours and/or which significantly change the skyline) will be assessed against a range of design issues, including:
- how the building relates to its surroundings, both in terms of how the base of the building fits in with the streetscape, and how the top of a tall building affects the skyline;
 - the contribution a building makes to pedestrian permeability and improved public accessibility;
 - the relationship between the building and hills and views;
 - the degree to which the building overshadows public spaces, especially open spaces and watercourses; and
 - the historic context of the building's surroundings.
- 2.18 What might be considered a tall building will vary according to the nature of the local area. For example, a ten storey building in a mainly two storey neighbourhood will be thought of as a tall building by those affected' (Historic England Advice Note 4, Tall Buildings, 2015)

- 2.19 Most of the tall buildings in the Borough are located within the Central Activity Zone (CAZ), covering the area immediately north of Euston Road southwards to Tottenham Court Road and Covent Garden. Outside of this area most of the tall buildings are confined to social housing estates built during the 1960s and 1970s with a few notable exceptions such as the Royal Hospital, Pond Street and Centre Heights, Finchley Road. Due to the prevalence of the Borough's heritage assets, all of Camden is considered to be sensitive to the development of tall buildings.
- 2.20 Policy D1 sets out the criteria against which proposals for tall buildings will be assessed. Key considerations relate to the integration of a building into its immediate context and impact on the public realm.
- 2.21 When integrating tall buildings, particularly those with a tower component, into existing or proposed new streets, the base of a building formed by a podium should relate to the prevailing height of other buildings forming the street frontage.
- 2.22 In addition to making a positive contribution to the public realm through the design of the base of the building, particular care should be taken to ensure that the design of upper parts of tall buildings minimise any impacts on local microclimates in terms of potential increases in wind speeds, wind turbulence and overshadowing. Furthermore careful consideration must be given to the impact of a proposal on the sky view and skyline from the public realm.
- 2.23 The Council will seek to maximise active frontages and the visual richness of the design of the base of any proposed tall building and how it integrates with the streetscape. Proposals should seek to provide legible entrances and minimise the impact of any dead or blank frontages. Careful consideration should be given to the location of loading bays, vehicular entrances and servicing requirements on the public realm.

Designing and maintaining a high-quality public realm

- 2.24 The design of public spaces, and the materials used, is very important. The size, layout and materials used in the spaces around buildings will influence how people use them, and help to create spaces that are welcoming, attractive, safe and useful. They can also contribute to other objectives such as reducing the impact of climate change (e.g. the use of trees and planters to reduce run-off and provide shading), biodiversity, local food production and Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDs), and provide useful amenity space. In Conservation Areas there may be particular traditional approaches to landscaping/boundary treatments that should be respected in new designs.
- 2.25 The spaces around new developments should be considered at the same time as the developments themselves and hard / soft landscaping and boundary treatments should be considered as part of wider cohesive design. The landscaping and trees chapter in this CPG, and individual Conservation Area Appraisals, provide further guidance on this issue.

- 2.26 Public art can be a catalyst for improved environmental quality by upgrading and animating public space and enhancing local character and identity through helping create a sense of place. The Council will therefore encourage the provision of art and decorative features as an integral part of public spaces, where they are appropriate to their location and enhance the character and environment.
- 2.27 Public art can also serve as an emblem of civic pride or corporate image. It can further improve the marketability of a property and add to the process of urban regeneration. In this sense public art can be seen, both in the short and long term, to add value to a development and to enhance the visual quality of an area.
- 2.28 A new development, particularly one which is large enough to attract significant numbers of visitors or to change its context, may be expected to incorporate public art as part of the necessary measures proposed to enhance public spaces and the surrounding townscape. Public art initiatives may more appropriately be an integral part of the design and commissioning process for new development or through the creative management and use of spaces and facilities. Exceptionally they may need to be provided or funded either through the use of section 106 agreements or planning conditions. For further guidance on the use of public art in the urban design process please see [CPG Artworks, statues and memorials](#) available on the Council website.
- 2.29 It is important that public spaces and streets are maintained to a high standard and so, in line with the Local Implementation Plan, the Council will continue to undertake public space enhancement works through specifically targeted programmes. The Designing safer environments chapter in this CPG provides more detailed guidance on the incorporation of safety and security considerations in public spaces.

Independent design review: building in design excellence

- 2.30 In accordance with Policies D1 and D2 of the Camden Local Plan, the Council expects and encourages design excellence in architecture and design within the Borough. Securing high quality development requires rigorous, early and effective dialogue between all those involved in the development process. Design review provides additional expert advice to inform the planning process. In line with the NPPF and in dialogue with design professionals, the Council aims to strengthen and expand the capacity for independent expert design review as part of the design process, via its Design Review Panel.
- 2.31 Developers and landowners will be encouraged to use design review as a useful mechanism for supporting the process of securing high quality design. This will be expected for development at all scales where appropriate. For more information about the Camden Design Review Panel please see the Council's website:
<https://www.camden.gov.uk/ccm/navigation/environment/planning-and-built-environment/camden-design-review-panel/>

2.32 The Council recognises that in addition to its own review panel there are other design review services that developers may use, including (but not exclusive to):

- In-house review panels
- Design Council CABA

Ensuring high quality detailed design

2.33 In accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework and Policy D1, the Council is committed to securing high quality design. Good design is essential to creating successful places and this is indivisible from good planning. It is important that the design quality of a development is retained through to completion. In line with Council Policy and the London Plan, the Council will consider a number of mechanisms to facilitate design quality through the planning process which include:

- the use of architect retention clauses in legal agreements where appropriate
- requiring a sufficient level of design information, including key construction details provided as part of planning applications to ensure the quality of design can be maintained if a permitted scheme is subject to subsequent minor amendments
- ensuring the wording of any planning permission granted, and associated conditions and/or legal agreement, provide clarity regarding the quality of design expected
- detailed design sections and supporting information where appropriate will be required to illustrate a proposal
- what we expect to support applications
- getting detailed design upfront
- townscape experts on applications for major development

Design and Access Statements

2.34 Design and Access Statements are documents that explain the design ideas and rationale behind a scheme. They should show that you have thought carefully about how everyone, including disabled people, older people and children, will be able to use the places you want to build.

2.35 Design and Access Statements should include a written description and justification of the planning application and sometimes photos, maps and drawings may be useful to further illustrate the points made. The length and detail of a Design and Access Statement should be related to the related to the size and complexity of the scheme. A statement for a major development is likely to be much longer than one for a small scheme.

- 2.36 Design and Access Statements are required to accompany all planning, conservation and listed building applications, except in certain circumstances as set out on our website www.camden.gov.uk/planning. Our website also provides a template for Design and Access Statements and lists the information that each statement should contain. Further guidance on Access Statements is provided in CPG4 Protecting and improving quality of life (Access for all chapter).

Further supporting information – detailed design

- 2.37 Careful detailed design and details determine the success of buildings. Therefore, for new buildings, we will require supporting information on detailed design to ensure design quality (where appropriate and consistent with the scale and significance of the proposal) for example:
- Details of specific building features e.g. window reveals, spandrels
 - Verified views
 - CGI's (supporting Computer Generated Imagery)
 - Visualisations

Further information

General	By Design: Urban Design in the Planning System – Towards Better Practice, DETR/CABE, 2000 Design and Access Statements; how to read, write and use them, CABE, 2007
Tall Buildings	Guidance on tall buildings, Historic England, 2015
Historic Environment	Understanding Place: Historic Area Assessments 2017; and Building in Context, English Heritage/CABE, 2002.
Streets and public realm	Manual for Streets, 2, 2010. TfL Healthy Streets for London, 2017
Other	Landscape Institute Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) ; and Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) .