

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