

# DESIGN CODES FACTSHEET

## Introduction

The purpose of this guidance is to explain design codes, where they should be used, what should be included and their adoption.

Whilst design codes are not mandatory, they may be required for strategically important sites in the city, particularly where identified through Area Action Plans or the Sustainable Neighbourhoods Development Plan Document.

CABE in its publication 'Making design policy work', defines good design as 'making places that are functional, durable, viable, good for people to use, and that reflect the importance of local character and distinctiveness'. Sustainability is also an important aspect that should be integral to design codes.

Design codes are a key mechanism to deliver high quality sustainable places, in combination with other documents that are submitted to support a planning application, such as a Spatial Masterplan, Design & Access Statement and a Climate Change Strategy.



## What is a design code?

'A design code is a set of illustrated design rules and requirements, which instruct and advise on the physical development of a site or area. The graphic and written components of the code are

detailed and precise, and build upon a design vision such as a master plan or other design and development framework for a site or area.

(Source: Annex B to Planning Policy Statement 3: Housing, DCLG, 2006)

A design code is a technical delivery document, which serves as a quality benchmark for the whole development, but not a prescription. Design Codes should be read in conjunction with other documents, which set out a clear vision, principles and character for the development, such as the Design & Access Statement and Spatial Master plan document. Codes should develop the design vision, and provide a clear set of requirements (the codes) to achieve/deliver this vision. The Spatial Master plan or Vision provides the broader

place based vision, whilst codes interpret and articulate this vision.

Design codes should be a separate clear succinct technical document, which is easy to understand and use by non-technical people.

## What are the advantages of codes?

There are a number of positive benefits of design codes for all parties involved, including:

- Greater design quality, character and sense of place.
- Greater co-ordination of different aspects at an earlier stage (e.g. highways, landscape and architecture), which avoid changes later in the process.
- Greater certainty for developers.
- Potentially faster process.

# DESIGN CODES FACTSHEET

- Better design cohesion between different developments or phases in an area.

## What sites should have design codes?

The following major application sites, particularly those that involve the following characteristics should submit design codes:

- Large sites (or multiple smaller related sites) that will be built out in phases over a long period of time.
- Sites in multiple ownership, where coordination between the parties is desirable.
- Sites likely to be developed by several different developers and/or design teams.

Design Codes may be required through Area Action Plans, for particular sites or combinations of sites. This

includes for example, North Plymstock, Millbay, Devonport, Derriford, City Centre, East End and Sutton Harbour Area Action Plans.

Other sites or areas could use site-specific design guidance such as site development briefs, where relevant.



## At what stage should they be produced?

Design codes can be prepared at different stages in the planning process, although the timing will

influence their content. If prepared prior to the granting of outline planning permission for example, design codes are likely to be more strategic and contain less technical detail. This will reflect the risk associated with undertaking very detailed design work prior to planning permissions being granted. Because they are less detailed, such design codes can, where appropriate, be supplemented by more detailed “mini codes” or other development briefs on a phase-by-phase basis or to deal specifically with particular topics such as detailed public realm design. This may be appropriate for very large schemes, which cannot be clearly defined from the outset. If this is the case the outline permission may include a planning condition requiring the submission of additional design codes at the reserved matters stage, and should clearly identify what

additional information is required.

Other codes may be able to be developed as part of the outline application. If a code is produced after the grant of outline permission, matters of further technical detail should be included in the design code.

Design codes should be produced in consultation with the local authority to ensure that they address the range of design issues but also take into account adoption and maintenance. They should also utilise a suitable range of design skills.

## What should codes include?

Design Codes should be succinct documents, with clear instructions for delivery. Some aspects of the codes will need to be mandatory and others will be discretionary

# DESIGN CODES FACTSHEET

and the distinction between these aspects of the code should be clearly identified. Codes should include the following information, where applicable:

- An overall regulating plan - This would show references to all relevant codes on one plan.
- Settlement patterns - Key structuring principles that relate to the broad sustainability and character within the development area. This may define distinct character areas, where relevant.
- Urban form principles - Urban structure and massing.
- Townscape - Townscape principles

including landmarks, vistas and focal points.

- Block principles - Handling of blocks and different block types.
- Frontage codes - Principles for building frontages and set back.
- Street hierarchy and codes - Details of street design and character, in line with street hierarchy, including details of junctions between different street types.
- Building types - The range of building types (e.g. semi-detached, commercial blocks, mixed use blocks, town houses).
- Density and building heights - The location

and range of building heights and density

- Land use - Mix of uses, including the different uses within a building.
- Parking - Strategies for parking and how this is accommodated on street or off street.
- Sustainability principles - Sustainability and the consideration of climate change should



be reflected in the overarching objectives of the design code, informing all aspects of design. As well as

site wide issues, this section may set specific benchmarks on for example energy, materials, water conservation, sustainable drainage and waste.

- Key spaces/ open spaces - Key characteristics of civic and green spaces.
- Public art - Integration of public art into the scheme.
- Key and focal buildings - Characteristics of key buildings. This could include briefs for buildings subject to design competitions.

These sections will also include information on proposed materials where relevant. Other issues covered will depend on the

# DESIGN CODES FACTSHEET

nature of the development area, but may include details for building on slopes, roofscape, boundary treatments, lighting or services for example.

## How can design codes be adopted?

Codes can be formalised within the Local Development Framework, or form part of the planning application process. Codes can be adopted through development agreements (S.106 agreements), or through planning conditions. The Council would expect design codes to be submitted to support the outline application, or prior to the submission of any of the reserved matters. S.106 agreements may make specific reference to the code, but should include provision to amend the code to allow flexibility. A condition may be attached which typically

requires that a development complies with the code. In some circumstances, however, the outline application can be conditioned to require the applicant to prepare a design code, whereby the design code is submitted as part of the reserved matters.

## Legislation related to Design Codes

Planning Policy Statement 1: Delivering Sustainable Development makes it clear that good design is a key element in achieving sustainable development and this is indivisible from good planning. Local authorities are encouraged to prepare specific guidance to promote local distinctiveness under PPS1. The value of design codes is also recognised in Planning Policy Statement 3: Housing, in order to improve the quality, value and delivery of residential development.



## Further Guidance

The Department for Communities and Local Government published Preparing Design Codes - A Practice Manual in November 2006, which provides guidance on design codes. The findings of three-year pilot studies into design codes were published in the document Design Coding in

Practice, An Evaluation (June 2006, DCLG). This guidance is not intended to repeat these documents, but set out the role of design codes in the context of development in Plymouth.

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/citiesandregions/preparingdesigncodes?view=Standard>

## Contact details

Planning Policy  
Department of Development  
Plymouth City Council  
Plymouth PL1 2AA  
Tel: 01752 304145  
Email:  
planningpolicy@plymouth.gov.uk