Character, Appearance and Design

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Legislation	• The Planning (Wales) Act 2015 • Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015
National policy and guidance	• Planning Policy Wales, Edition 12, Chapter 3 • Future Wales, The National Plan 2040, Policy 2 • Technical Advice Note 12: Design, 2016 • Site and context analysis guide: Capturing the value of a site, 2016 • Design and Access Statements in Wales, 2017 • Planning for Sustainable Buildings, 2014 • Other relevant WG practice guidance, Manuals etc. • Active Travel Act guidance, 2021
Other guidance	• Design Commission for Wales: Placemaking Guide 2020 • Charterdcfw.org/placemaking/placemaking-charter/

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Introduction

1. This chapter introduces the topic of character and appearance and how these issues can be tackled when writing decisions. It sets out the broad approach towards addressing character and appearance issues in casework and includes questions and prompts. Reference is also made to national planning policy's emphasis on good design and placemaking. The appendices include a glossary of terms and examples of reasoning from relevant cases. This chapter is not exhaustive and should be read alongside other relevant ITM chapters and local and national planning policies and guidance.

Character and appearance

2. Character and appearance are often referred to alongside design, but they are distinct and have different meanings:
   a. **Character** – What a building or place feels like. The combination of qualities in a place that makes them different from others. It evolves out of rich and complex interaction between people and their built and natural environments (Para 4.8 of TAN 12 lists several character appraisal features).
   b. **Appearance** – What a building or place looks like – the outward visible qualities such as the external built form, its architecture, materials, decoration, lighting, colour, and texture. The appearance of a place has significant impacts on the way people operate within their environment, how they perceive their environment, and what types of people and businesses are drawn to a place over time.
   c. **Design** – The way in which something is arranged or formed. Design shapes the overall character and appearance of an area.

3. Changes in the appearance of a building can affect its character and the character of the surrounding area but the character of an area can also be affected by other factors as set out in this chapter.

Placemaking and good design

4. Character and appearance are not the same as design or placemaking, but part of them. Planning Policy Wales, Edition 12 (PPW) places a strong emphasis on placemaking. Placemaking considers the context, function and relationships between a development site and its wider surroundings. Proposals must seek to deliver developments that address the national sustainable placemaking outcomes that are listed in PPW and outline what a sustainable place will look like. A placemaking approach is not just about the public realm or large-scale developments. The conditions that determine the success of a place are established by the considerations of several factors such as site selection, density, and mix of uses, green infrastructure and accessibility. Similarly, PPW explains that design is not just about the architecture of a building but the relationship between all elements of the natural and built environment and between people and places.

5. Place is a concept made up of several factors, amongst which are the uniqueness of the landscape, the buildings and structures on and around it, the people who inhabit and use the buildings and spaces, and the way they move to and through the site. The term can be used for locations at almost any geographic scale, depending on context. Place also includes descriptions of a site's features and environmental conditions. The physical and human characteristics of a place make it unique.

6. Good design then responds to these features. PPW and TAN 12 both provide extensive information about the importance of good design and how this can be achieved. It is not the intention of this ITM chapter to repeat this information, but to assist you in the application of it in casework.

7. In terms of character and appearance achieving 'good design' includes:
   - Sustaining or enhancing local character
   - Promoting legible development
   - Promoting a successful relationship between public and private space
   - Promoting quality, choice, and variety; and
   - Promoting innovative design.

8. PPW is clear that 'design' should go beyond aesthetic considerations and consider the way that an area functions and how the proposal would relate to those functions. However, as Inspectors we can only focus on the evidence before us. To assist in this process, it may help to break the proposal into distinct elements, namely:

   - **Layout** is the framework of routes and blocks of development that connect locally/more widely, and the way development is arranged to create streets, open spaces, and buildings and how these relate to one other.
   - **Landscape** is the character and appearance of land, including its shape, form, ecology, natural features, hard and soft landscape, and the way these components combine.
   - **Form** is the three-dimensional shape and modelling of buildings and the spaces they define. The form of a building or a space has a relationship with the uses and activities it accommodates, and with the form of the wider place where it is sited.
   - **Scale** is the height, width and length of each building proposed within a development in relation to its surroundings. This relates both to the overall size and massing of individual buildings and spaces in relation to their surroundings, and to the scale of their parts.
   - **Appearance** is the aspects of a building or space which determine the visual impression the building or space makes, such as its architecture, building techniques, decoration, colour, texture, and lighting.
   - **Materials** used for a building or landscape affect how well it functions and lasts over time. They also influence how it relates to what is around it and how it is experienced.
   - **Detailing** affects the appearance of a building or space and how it is experienced. It also affects how well it weathers and lasts over time.

9. Additional information about Placemaking can be found on the Design Commission for Wales website: Placemaking - Design Commission for Wales (dcfw.org).

Decision-making

Site visit preparation

10. Prior to the site visit remember to review the documents on file to make sure you understand the site, locality, and proposal. The plans may provide you with some idea of the area surrounding the appeal site, such as the pattern of streets, density of development and design of buildings. Online mapping, such as Streetview, can be helpful to familiarise oneself with an area before visiting the site. Design and Access Statements can be a useful guide to the character of an area and may give some analysis of how this has informed the design, as do Landscape Visual Impact Assessments.

11. Do the Council refer to any development briefs, local plan policies or design guidance that may require details to be checked on site? Remember the differing statutory duties regarding conservation areas, the setting of listed buildings, National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), covered in other ITM Chapters.

12. Remember to read any third-party representations as these may offer an insight as to what residents think is special about the area or how it is used by the community.

13. Following your review of the case file have you given yourself enough time on site to facilitate an assessment of the character and appearance of the area? Depending on the scale of the development you may need to view the site and its environs from many different vantage points.

14. A check list to use on your site visit may be useful. The notes you make could form the basis for your decision.

Assessing character and appearance

15. The following section sets out the overall approach to assessing character and appearance. The four steps set out here provide prompts to consider when assessing a proposal. However, they will not always be relevant or require coverage in each case, which will depend on the issues before you. On more straightforward cases, the steps can be weaved together when writing your decision, and this encouraged in the later section ‘writing about design in decisions.’ Examples of each step are provided in Annex 2 to this chapter.

Step 1: Analyse the existing character and appearance of the area.

16. The first step is to assess the character and appearance of the surrounding area. The following questions are prompts to consider when assessing the design context of an appeal scheme, but individual questions should only apply where they are relevant to the proposal before you.

17. <u>How would you describe the characteristics of the area?</u>
    - Is the site isolated, on the edge or in the middle of a settlement? Is the settlement linear or more cluster shaped?
    - Is the area urban, suburban, rural? Is it single or mixed use, civic, industrial, coastal (developed or undeveloped)?
    - What are the area characteristics? Think about the topography, aspect, function, and activities. What are the functions and activities? Is it busy and heavy trafficked, or isolated? Is it noisy or quiet?
    - What are the prevalent building forms, architectural character, boundary treatments, road layouts and building materials? Think about the scale, bulk, and massing of buildings; and the consistency, uniformity, or variety in features (is there rhythm or a pattern to features, such as spaces around buildings?) Think about:
        - Roof forms
        - Horizontal or a vertical emphasis of the buildings
        - Window shapes and forms
        - Solid to void ratios
        - Height and width of the buildings around the site
        - Any distinctive design rhythms (e.g. uniformly designed terraces, consistent spaces between buildings, and dominant materials); and
        - Small details such as brick bond patterns.

    - Are there significant open spaces that the development would impinge on, i.e. corner plots?
    - How accessible is the area by non-car modes? Note where bus stops, cycle lanes and footways are located.
    - Can you see the site/building from vantage points (consider from the public realm – streets and footpaths, but also think about private spaces – for example gardens and habitable room windows).
    - Is the site prominent? Is it screened by topography, planting, or buildings?

18. <u>What makes the area locality distinctive?</u>
    - Are there aspects of the local built character that could inform local distinctiveness, such as layout, scale, building lines, density, garden sizes, roof forms, window shapes and symmetry?
    - Is there space around and between buildings? Do they provide continuity or gaps? Is there rhythm to these features?
    - Are there aspects of soft landscaping that could inform local distinctiveness, such as mature hedgerows, trees, woodlands, rivers and other water features, open spaces, and verges?

19. What gives it a sense of place?
    - Are there important cultural or historic areas such as landmark buildings, frontages, entrance locations and scheduled ancient monuments?
    - What are the surrounding uses, do these pose any limitations?
    - How would the proposal be interpreted in relation to the local building context?
    - Does the appearance of the area (the form, materials, height and massing of buildings and structures) contribute to a strong sense of place and/or a positive character? Or is the site on the cusp of different areas?

20. What is the quality of the area?
    - What features contribute to or detract from the quality of the environment?
    - Is there a very strong palette of local materials, details like brick bond patterns or use of street furniture?
    - Are there opportunities to improve biodiversity?
    - Can you make some judgement about the 'quality' of the area? Is it 'spacious,' 'well-landscaped,' 'open,' 'orderly,' 'organic' or 'vibrant'?

Step 2: Understand the proposal.

21. Next, briefly outline any relevant aspects of the proposed development. Focus on the areas where there may be disagreement and avoid specifying all elements and dimensions of the appeal scheme. They should only be described where necessary to the decision.

22. The following questions are prompts when considering the proposal:
    - What is the form and function?
    - What is the physical and human relationship with the appeal site?
    - Have the design values been articulated in the application, such as a Design and Access Statement?
    - Is there adequate information? (see section on 'outline planning permission and design.')

23. Design and Access Statements can be uninformative as to why a development has been designed the way it has been. They do not look at the design process itself and what principles were adopted, but rather just describe the proposal. If it is being argued that the proposal is appropriate to its context and there is no information in the Design and Access statement that analyses the context and explains how that has led to the design of the proposal, it is quite legitimate for the decision-maker to say that.
24. Where a project is large or complex there may be specialised input from a range of consultants. It is important that specialist input is well coordinated and follows any design brief for the site. For example, do acoustic mitigation measures, such as fencing, follow the design principles for the site?

25. Also consider any form of Landscape Visual Impact Assessment and take time to compare the scope of assessments, the methodologies applied, the

magnitudes of effect identified and the number and type of receptors (see separate ‘Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment’ chapter).

26. While it is necessary to understand the relevant elements of the proposal, in practice when writing decisions step 2 will be brief and often weaved into step 3 (see ‘writing about character and appearance in decisions’).

Step 3: Assess the impact.

27. Once you have grasped the proposed design you can then assess the effect of the proposal on its surroundings that you have already described. Consider how the character or appearance of the place might be changed were the proposal to go ahead, and explain precisely, concisely, and persuasively whether this change would:
    - Be material.
    - Be harmful to the character or appearance; or
    - Improve the quality of the area?

28. The effect of design upon the character and appearance of an area comes down to context and how a proposal relates to its surroundings. It is equally valid to have a contrasting architectural style as one which reflects the surrounding architecture.

29. Matters to consider in your assessment of impact include:

    - How would the proposal relate to its context?
    - How are public and private spaces defined?
    - Does the proposal include or omit good design factors?
    - Would the proposed design promote or reinforce local distinctiveness?
    - How would the proposed development relate to patterns of buildings or gaps?
    - Is the proposal legible? Where is the front door? Does the proposal acknowledge landmarks or key buildings?
    - Is it well-articulated?
    - Would the proposal sit comfortably in its surroundings?
    - Would the proposal be inclusive towards the public realm?
    - Would it create a pleasant place?
    - How would views be affected?
    - Would the proposed materials blend or contrast?

30. Further guidance on writing decisions is provided later in this chapter.

Step 4: Relate the proposal to national and local planning policy.

31. The final step is to relate your findings on character and appearance to local and national planning policy and guidance. It is therefore necessary to understand the character and appearance in relation to development plan policies, Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) and other evidence where applicable.

32. Local Development Plan (LDP) policies can include specific design considerations, such as:

- New development proposals must have regard to important elements of local heritage, culture, landscape, townscape, views, and vistas.
- New development proposals must sympathetically integrate with the surrounding natural and built environment, considering the unique rural character of the village and the quality of the surrounding landscape and seascape.
- Proposed extensions must be subservient to adjoining/adjacent buildings.
- New development proposals must be well proportioned and in the spaces it creates; and
- Ensure new developments have active frontages onto streets and spaces to provide natural surveillance and character.

33. These development management policies are often generic and whilst planning applications must be determined in accordance with these policies material considerations such as particular aspects of the character and appearance of the area may lead to a design, contrary to the policy, being acceptable.

34. Design guidelines in an SPG can be useful in setting out the Local Planning Authority's (LPA's) design aspirations, but the breach of a design guideline in a SPG document should not on its own be a reason to refuse permission or dismiss an appeal. In the specifics of a case, would the character and appearance of the area be harmed?

35. PPW explains that not every development or policy proposal will be able to demonstrate they can meet all of the national sustainable placemaking outcomes, but this does not mean that they should not be considered in the development management process to see if a proposal can be improved or enhanced to promote wider well-being.

Casework considerations

Writing about character and appearance in decisions

36. Everyone's perception is slightly different. All development will alter the appearance and/or the character of an area in some way. Whether that is positive, negative, or neutral is nearly always subjective. Addressing design matters as part of the decision-writing process can therefore be challenging.

However, as with most areas of casework, articulating the arguments in a comprehensive and well-reasoned manner will assist the decision-writing process. Understanding and utilising design terminology and applying it correctly can often assist this process, and several key terms are set out as an annex to this chapter.

37. There is no single way to objectively assess design quality and there will necessarily always be a degree of subjective judgement. Nevertheless, it is important to try and remain objective in your reasoning about the character and appearance of an area, rather than assessing how attractive an area is. The 4 steps outlined in the previous section will help to approach casework and consider the proposal. However, writing your decision need not be so structured, particularly on smaller or more straightforward schemes. A proportionate approach should be applied particularly on smaller and/or more straightforward casework. And example of weaving in steps 1-4 into a decision is provided in the box below.

Extracts from a boundary fence decision (Ref 3256992) in relation to the 4-step approach

Step 1 – "The front and (road)side boundary treatments of the appeal site and others in the immediate area predominantly comprise post-and-wire fences, mixed hedges or walls/fences of modest height. The visual permeability or soft landscaped character of these boundaries create an openness which contributes positively to the character and appearance of the locality."

Step 2 – "The appeal proposal would comprise vertical feather-edged timber fences bounding two sides of the property's rear garden. Whilst the part abutting the property's driveway would be limited in length, the section bounding Rockleigh Avenue would extend a considerable distance along the footway."

Step 3 – "…for most observers it would present a visually impermeable and somewhat featureless barrier. From several nearby vantagepoints the considerable height, length and unbroken appearance of the appeal scheme would fundamentally detract from the open character of the immediate area. The corner plot siting would further augment the fence's visibility as an incongruous part of the immediate street scene."

"I acknowledge that the fence is intended to provide security and privacy to the appellant and her family. There is little to indicate, however, that a fence of the type and scale proposed is the only means by which to satisfactorily achieve these aims."

Step 4 – "I therefore conclude that the appeal proposal would not accord with the design and placemaking objectives of policy SP6 of the Caerphilly Local Development Plan. For the same reasons the proposal would also conflict with the aims of the Council's Supplementary Planning Guidance entitled 'LDP7 – Householder Development', which amongst other things seeks to ensure that boundary treatments contribute to the quality of a street."

38. The main issue is typically set out as “the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area.” It generally is not necessarily to refer to the effects on the character and appearance of the existing dwelling/building and surrounding area in the main issue. If a proposal would be harmful to the existing property, it follows that there would be harm to the character and appearance of the surrounding area. In such instances, if the reasoning addresses effects on the existing property and surrounding area, the main issue need not refer to both elements.

39. When writing your decision, keep the reasoning focussed. Describe the area early in the decision, relating it to the proposal. This helps to lay the foundations for your conclusions. Avoid excessive descriptions. For small scale schemes you may only need a few sentences to address any issues, picking up on the losing parties’ relevant arguments. Try to weave the reasoning on the proposal in with a description of your assessment of the character and appearance, rather than setting out that assessment as a freestanding statement. This creates shorter and more focussed decisions. A good approach is to juxtapose an observation (describing or analysing an element of character/appearance relevant to the appeal) with a comment explaining why the proposal would be in or out of keeping with this.

40. Keep the language simple; remember you are writing for the public in plain English. A list of design terms is set out in Annex 1 to this chapter and can assist with articulating your reasoning, but they should be used sparingly.

41. Address the losing party’s arguments. Consider any counter arguments presented in the evidence but come to your own view. Do not repeat words or phrases of the winning party.

42. **Phrases and words to avoid** - Avoid using nebulous terms such as ‘amenity’ or ‘overdevelopment’ in character and appearance reasoning. Visual amenity is only referred to in advertisement casework. There should be no need to use architectural terminology unless it is helpful to the case. Avoid using ‘ugly,’ ‘naïve,’ ‘pedestrian’ (in describing design context) and ‘eye-watering’ in your reasoning.

43. Remember to conclude your decision with reference to the relevant development plan policy and, where relevant, SPG. It is sometimes helpful to quote an SPG early on in your decision, particularly if the Local Planning Authority or Appellant have, and there is specific advice which supports your reasoning. In most cases, a brief acknowledgement of the SPG and any relevant provisions at the end of your decision will suffice.

44. Difference or change is not necessarily harmful. If you are unsure about the harm, go back to the area’s characteristics (step 1). Ask yourself:

    - Would the proposal harmfully erode those features that contribute positively to the area?

- How would the proposal be perceived in real life (based on your site visit observations)?

45. Other practical points to remember:

- Do you understand the drawings and what is proposed?
- It is not normally essential to specify measurements in your decision (see 'The Approach to Decision Making' ITM for further advice).
- Have you applied any relevant statutory duties (for example, conservation areas, the setting of listed buildings, National Parks, and areas of outstanding natural beauty? (Refer to other ITM chapters as necessary)
- Avoid criticising the character or appearance of the host building, or the surrounding area.
- Do not attempt to impose a particular architectural taste or style arbitrarily and avoid inhibiting opportunities for innovative design solutions (PPW 3.16). Likewise, a contextual approach should not necessarily prohibit contemporary design (TAN 12 4.9).
- Similarly, avoid fettering future decision-makers – your decision and findings are specific to the scheme before you, and you should not provide suggestions as to what might be acceptable in an amended scheme in case one comes forward in the future (and before us).
- Cumulative effects (different from setting a precedent) – the cumulative effects of a proposal in its context might be raised in the evidence but in practice it is infrequent as a reason for dismissal since every case is considered on its merits. You may consider any cumulative effects if there are very similar buildings/site contexts nearby (to date or in the future, if you have the evidence) which would be difficult for future decision-makers to discern differences.

Poor design

46. Take a robust approach to poor design. Where a poorly designed scheme causes harm to the character and appearance of the area, it can be reasonable to dismiss the appeal. Even inoffensive buildings may not be adequate if they fail to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions. Much will depend on the context and extent to which there is evidence of site analysis. For example, when considered in isolation, the design of a building may not be fundamentally bad, but the design may not have taken cues from the surroundings and, as a result, would not integrate well. Even when views of a building or site are limited, poor design remains harmful in its own right and could be detrimental to the building and/or site location, regardless of whether it can be readily seen from different (public or private) viewpoints. The prompts in steps 1 and 3 should assist with analysing the site context and proposal. Annex 2 of this chapter provides examples where proposed schemes have failed to integrate with their surroundings and would not achieve the national sustainable placemaking outcomes in PPW.

47. If a contemporary design incorporates similar design elements as the existing buildings around it, then it is more likely to successfully integrate into the

surrounding area. In some instances, local and/or detailed design principles for an area can provide a clear indication of the types of development that will be supported in an area, especially where they link to detailed local design guides, masterplans, or codes. Any reliance on such policies should always be reinforced by your site visit observations.

48. If you are criticising specific parts of the scheme, be careful not to stray away from the points raised by the LPA or other objectors. Doing so could be seen as introducing new issues and risk a complaint or challenge. You should also avoid criticising the character and appearance of the host building or surrounding area or being too critical about mediocrity.

Outline planning applications and design

49. Design is often considered at outline application stage to assist community engagement, inform an environmental impact assessment or design and access statement (where required) and provide a framework for the preparation and submission of reserved matters proposals. Design quality cannot be achieved through an outline planning application alone, particularly where one or more design-related matters are reserved for future determination. Outline planning applications typically allow fewer details about the proposal to be submitted than a full planning application, and design matters can be subject to planning condition (see below).

50. Where an appellant has chosen to submit design details as part of an appeal and has not indicated that those details are submitted "for illustrative purposes only" (or has otherwise indicated that they are not formally part of the appeal/application), you may need to state that you are treating them as such insofar as they show details of matters which are clearly reserved for future consideration.

The use of planning conditions in character and appearance casework

51. The appearance of a proposal and its relationship to its surroundings are material planning considerations. Inspectors should not attempt to use conditions simply to impose matters of taste. However, conditions can be useful in securing and maintaining desired details if a proposal is to make a positive contribution to a site and its surroundings and show consideration for its local context. In such cases, the use of conditions may be acceptable.

52. Think about whether conditions are needed to secure key aspects of the design. For example, building materials, window details, the external colour scheme, and hard and soft landscaping. If it is a key matter in the design of the building, then a feature or material may need to be the subject of a specific condition. Planning conditions should only be imposed where they satisfy the six tests (see Welsh Government Circular 016/2014 ‘The Use of Planning Conditions for Development Management’). Each condition should include a reason linked to relevant local or national policy.

53. During the decision-making stage, where limited design documentation has been prepared as part of the outline planning application, an Inspector can

consider using conditions to ensure that fundamentally important principles are respected in detailed design and to set out if there are further detailed design requirements to make a scheme acceptable. Conditions on design can be identified at the outline planning application stage allowing for the details to be submitted for later determination as part of a reserved matters application.

54. A scheme which is reliant on conditions to make it acceptable should be examined very carefully. Would it meet the fundamental objectives of good design which go beyond style or ornament?

Annex 1: Glossary of design terms

Authenticity – The quality of a place where things are what they seem: where buildings that look old are old, and where the social and cultural values that the place seems to reflect did shape it.

Background building – A building that is not a distinctive landmark.

Bay – Vertical subdivision of a building elevation.

Block – The area bounded by a set of streets and undivided by any other significant streets.

Bonding pattern – The way in which bricks or blocks are laid i.e. Flemish, English, English Garden Wall, Stretcher bond, stack bonding etc.

Building element – A feature (such as a door, window, or cornice) that contributes to the overall design of a building.

Building line – The line formed by the frontages of buildings along a street.

Building shoulder height – The top of a building's main facade.

Bulk – The combined effect of the arrangement, volume and shape of a building or group of buildings. Also called massing.

Contemporary design – The architectural styles trending in the present day. A contemporary design is characterised by simplicity, clean lines, a blend of function and form, often with sustainable materials and adaptive designs. To varying degrees, the approach is constantly evolving to reflect current tastes and technological advancements.

Context – The setting of a site or area and the features of a site or area (including land uses, built and natural environment, and social and physical characteristics).

Desire line – An imaginary line linking facilities or places which people would find it convenient to travel between easily.

Diversity – The use of buildings and spaces and the variety of these features in the area, such as the mix of uses and tenures.

Enclosure – The use of buildings to create a sense of defined space. Facade - The principal face of a building.

Fenestration – The arrangement of windows on a facade.

Figure/ground diagram – A plan showing the relationship between built form and publicly accessible space (including streets and the interiors of public buildings such as churches) by presenting the former in black and the latter as a white background, or the other way round.

Fine grain – The quality of an area's layout of building blocks and plots having small and frequent subdivisions.

Height to width ratio – Determines the degree of enclosure of a street or space, the height of the buildings compared to the distance between buildings facing each other.

Landmark – A building or structure that stands out from the background buildings.

Legibility – The degree to which a place or building can be easily understood by its users and the clarity of the image it presents to the wider world. This includes an appraisal of key buildings or landscape features, junctions, views and vistas, boundaries, and barriers (physical or perceived e.g. heavy traffic).

Live edge – Provided by a building or other feature whose use is directly accessible from the street or space which it faces. The opposite effect to a blank wall.

Local distinctiveness – The positive features of a place and its communities which contribute to its special character and sense of place.

Massing – The combined effect of the arrangement, volume and shape of a building or group of buildings.

Node – A place where activity and routes are concentrated. Perimeter block – a block with the buildings situated around the edges which may or may not be continuous.

Permeability – The degree to which a place has a variety of pleasant, convenient, and safe routes through it.

Plot ratio – A measurement of density expressed as gross floor area divided by the net site area.

Proportion – The relationship of two or more elements in a design and how they compare with one another. Good proportion adds harmony, symmetry, or balance among the parts of a design.

Rhythm – The regular, harmonious recurrence of a specific element, often a single specific entity coming from the categories of line, shape, form, colour, light, shadow, and sound.

Solid to void ratio – The proportion of a building elevation that is wall compared to the proportion that is windows or other openings.

Traditional design – A building may be traditional on account of its age, typology, construction technique or the material from which it is made. A more recently designed building (such as mock-Tudor style) could be traditional on account of its style, even though its materials and construction techniques may be more recent.

Uniformity – Defined as the state or characteristic of being even, normal, equal, or similar. Uniformity and consistency help users extract meaning from the design of an application, keeping them focused on the tasks and not distracted by design ambiguities. Elements such as visual hierarchy, proportion, alignment, and typography play major parts in the uniformity of a design.

Urban grain - The pattern of the arrangement and size of buildings and their plots in a settlement; and the degree to which an area's pattern of street-blocks and street junctions is respectively small and frequent, or large and infrequent.

Urban structure - The framework of routes and spaces that connect locally and more widely, and the way developments, routes and open spaces relate to one another.

Vernacular - The way in which ordinary buildings were built in a particular place before local styles, techniques and materials were superseded by imports.

Annex 2: Examples of reasoning

Describing the character and/or appearance of an area

(3267139) “The appeal relates to a semi-detached, hipped roofed property, situated within a row of dwellings of similar age which front onto the street in a staggered formation. A flat roofed single storey garage adjoins the side elevation of the dwelling and abuts a garage of similar height at No. 92. The gaps in built form created by these single storey side garages and hipped roofs lend the immediate area a spacious character which contributes positively to its appearance.”

(3265535) “The appeal relates to a modern detached property within a planned residential estate, located near to the junction of Heol Y Cwm and Maes Y Gwair. Despite some visual homogeneity, dwellings in the immediate area differ in terms of their siting, form and design, presenting a varied street scene. The presence of modest front/side gardens, perceptible gaps between dwellings and glimpsed views of the surrounding woodland are attributes of the area which contribute positively to its character and appearance.”

(3271099) The appeal relates to a relatively unmodified bay fronted bungalow featuring a hipped roof. Whilst bungalows of similar design lie to either side and opposite the appeal property, many have been modified in various ways, most notably via the insertion of gabled or flat roofed dormers to the side or front roof planes. Properties marking the junction with Caegwyn Road feature pronounced gables to their side or front elevations, and other dwellings of notably different appearance lie to the appeal site’s northeast. Thus, although the modest height and hipped or gabled roofs of dwellings afford the street a spacious appearance, the variation in design contributes to a relatively mixed character on the part of Greenfield Road near to the appeal site.

Weaving steps 1 and 3 into your reasoning (describing the existing area and explaining why the proposal would be in or out of keeping):

(3267139) “…the extended dwelling would span the width of the plot. The gap at first floor level between Nos. 90 and 92, which currently provides a visual break in built form, would be significantly reduced as a result. The apparent diminution in this gap would be accentuated by the projecting front extension, which despite featuring a hipped roof with a ridge lower than that of the main dwelling would substantially increase the building’s bulk and mass at its western boundary. Despite the distance between the dwelling and the footway and the partial screening provided by the front boundary hedge, these attributes would afford the side and front extension a dominant appearance that would harm the area’s character and appearance.”

(3271279) The proposed garage would be positioned on the first terrace, its front elevation broadly aligned with the side elevation of the dwelling. Its considerable height would be amplified by its siting on land higher than Farm Road. Despite the use of a pitched roof, its perceived bulk would be exacerbated by the blank flank wall facing the highway. These attributes would considerably urbanise and enclose the appearance of the plot forward of the dwelling, which other than retaining walls and railings exhibits a predominantly open character. Although existing or additional

landscaping in the existing buffer strip would, once mature, soften the appearance of the garage, it would not adequately screen the structure. The use of materials to match those in the dwelling would have little effect in reducing the proposal's unwanted visual impacts.

(3265535) "…due to the dwelling's siting the proposed extension would result in a substantial increase in the scale of an existing flank wall abutting the footway. This wall lies opposite No 14 Heol Y Cwm, the gabled flank wall of which faces the highway and lies in close proximity to the footway. In combination with the scale, form and siting of No 14, the increased bulk of the appeal proposal would create an overtly urban and stark 'pinch point' at this section of Maes Y Gwair which would conflict with the character of the immediate area. This harmful visual effect would not be mitigated by the extension's lower roof ridge or eaves relative to the original dwelling, nor by the materials used in the proposed flank wall, and it would be readily visible from several nearby viewpoints. As a consequence, the proposed extension would conflict with advice set out at paragraph 6.1 of the Council's 'Residential Extensions and Alterations' Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) for additions to a property to relate well to the character and context of the surrounding area."

(3271099) "Unlike others nearby, the proposed front roof extension would occupy much of the front roof plane. However, the base of the front dormer would be set back from the eaves, moderating its mass. In my view, its form would positively reflect the original profile of the front elevation and its design and fenestration would appear as a harmonious addition to the dwelling. Given the varied form of roof extensions and presence of pronounced gables in visual range, I consider that the altered front elevation would be complementary to the immediate locality and not harmful to its character and appearance."

Example of quoting SPG where it was supportive of the Inspector's findings

(3271099) "The Council's 'Residential Extensions and Alterations' Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) provides advice on the application of policy KP5 of the Cardiff Local Development Plan (LDP). Para 7.77 of the SPG emphasises that the design of dormer windows should be considered carefully and says that they should be avoided on the front elevation of the building unless they are a local feature. The SPG also provides other advice about the position and scale of dormers to which I have had regard.

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Where an SPG design guideline breach was not determinative

(3267139) “The Council’s ‘Residential Extensions and Alterations’ Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) provides advice on the application of policy KP5 of the Cardiff Local Development Plan (LDP). Amongst other things, the SPG states that it is important that semi-detached properties appear as a balanced pair. However, although the proposed side/front extension would not mirror the form of No. 88, I do not consider that the resulting asymmetry would in itself appear obtrusive due to the significant stagger in the building line between Nos. 90 and 92 and the absence of any overt visual uniformity between nearby semi-detached pairs.”

Where other schemes which have been cited as comparable development

(3274619) “I saw on my site visit that No 55 Heol Johnson has recently been extended to the front. Whilst I do not have the full details of that case before me, the development has largely been completed and the presence of this nearby extension is a material consideration in this appeal. However, despite its similar form and width, the front extension at No 55 is notably shallower than that subject to this appeal. Whilst the front garden at No 55 is of more limited depth than that at the appeal site, in my view the orientation, siting and scale of the proposal would afford it a considerably greater prominence in the street scene. The presence of this other extension would not mitigate or justify the appeal proposal’s harmful visual effects. Nor would the use of external materials to match the original dwelling offer acceptable mitigation.”

(3265535) “My attention has been drawn to other examples of development nearby, which I saw on my site visit. Whilst I acknowledge that there are other dwellings in the vicinity that are similar in form or siting to the appeal proposal, in the main, blank flank walls facing the public realm are single storey and/or set back from the footway. Although No 24 Meadowfield Way is an exception, I consider the site context to be materially different to the appeal site, as the dwellings opposite No 24 are set well back from the footway and have principal elevations facing the street.”

Examples where placemaking has been cited in decisions

(CAS-02187-Q0F9C5) “The subdivision of the entire site, exacerbated by the irregular shape of the appeal site, limits the potential site layout options and the associated opportunity to achieve the most efficient use of the land. The proposal fails to satisfactorily demonstrate how it would respond to development of the remaining land and fails to provide the corresponding infrastructure contributions. The proposed layout would have a harmful effect on the character and appearance of the area. It fails to align with the placemaking aims of Future Wales and PPW.”

(CAS-02881-T8Q1C6) “Bringing the above threads together, the appeal scheme would not prejudice future development of the allocated site, and the illustrative masterplan, on face value, meets *[Settlement Group Statements]* SGS requirements for *[housing allocation]* H0305. Nevertheless, as a piecemeal development, I do not consider the appeal scheme delivers the optimum development of the site and, for the wider allocation, would prejudice achieving the sustainable placemaking principles set out in FW. I conclude that the proposal would represent undesirable piecemeal development which would be contrary to

LDP Policies S02 and LU24. It would also conflict with LDP Policy DM06, which states amongst other things that development should reflect a clear understanding of the local physical, social, economic and environmental context, echoing the sustainable placemaking outcomes, as well as Design and Open Space SPG advice and the advice within FW."

Annex 3: Guidance on development types

The following points are prompts to consider when approaching common casework types and should be read alongside the broader advice in this chapter.

For **householder developments** key considerations will include:

- The presence and extent of locally distinctive design details – form, scale, and massing of buildings; and the use of materials.
- The extent of architectural unity or informality – roof pitches, window positions and styles, porches, front/side/rear extensions, and front/rear dormer windows.
- The individual features of the proposal – would they respond to site context and complement the local character, enhance the surrounding area, or contrast? Would that contrast be harmful to the character and appearance of the area?
- Local policies and guidance – Do the LPA have a householder development SPG? How does the proposal respond to the SPG advice? (see advice in para 34 of this chapter).

For **commercial developments** key considerations will include:

- Appearance – form, scale, and use of materials. What are the window proportions and extent of blank facades?
- Legibility – access and movement
- Boundary details – hard/soft landscaping, means of enclosure, security measures.
- The proportions of shopfronts, signs, and lettering in the area.

In **rural areas** key considerations will include:

- The absence or presence of built form
- The site's location – key views, vistas, and relationship to the landscape (built and natural features)
- Locally distinctive design elements (building forms and features such as roof pitches, window proportions and palette of materials)
- Rural character – are any special qualities or noteworthy features of the rural landscape (or townscape) recognised, and how would the proposal respond to them?
- Conversions – would the existing building character be retained and/or enhanced? How would the proposal be viewed and understood in the context? Does the site appraisal offer potential for more contemporary or innovative design solutions?